THE WHIRLWIND

EDNA WORTHLEY UNDERWOOD

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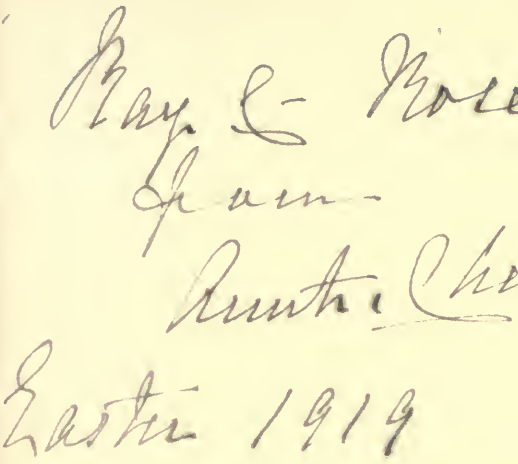

Ray C. Rose
from
Aunt Charlotte
Easter 1919

THE WHIRLWIND

"We must not be serious, you and I,
We must be only happy."

See page 95

THE WHIRLWIND

BY

EDNA WORTHLEY UNDERWOOD

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

BY

WILLIAM A. KIRKPATRICK

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DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER
ALICE HOWARD WORTHLEY

". . . ye live on ye mighty ones,
Upon rebellion fed and bitter wars,
Ye heroes great of heart — of Catherine."

PUSHKIN,
"Memories of Czarskoe Selo."

"Fortunate the one who shall tell within a century the story of Catherine the Great."

VOLTAIRE.

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THE WHIRLWIND

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CHAPTER I

THE CONCERT

The old wooden Anicza Palace stood in a pale, faded garden which occupied the space where later rose the Alexander Theater and the Public Library. On one side a little river bordered it and the Czernisev Pond, both extensions of the far Finnish Gulf and the dull, sluggish Arctic waters. The Grand Duke was giving a concert in honor of the departure of the famous violinist, Nicholas Murievich, in order to gratify his own passion for music in permitting himself the pleasure of listening to him again. And he was killing two birds with one stone, so to speak, by celebrating at the same time, on this November evening, the twentieth anniversary of the accession to the throne of his aunt, the blessed Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna. By his express order, inspired by the frail health of her Majesty, the guests and members of the court had assembled early. And among the guests, by some strange, fleeting caprice of the unstable imperial host, who was moved merely by willfulness, there were a goodly number of Russians and commoners present, as if the belated idea had come to the Grand Duke to conciliate opponents and win friends.

When the guests were assembled, the voice of a silver trumpet suddenly spread silence among them, announcing

the approach of her Majesty, the Empress. At the south end of the room folding doors were rolled back, and, across the polished floor of the great salon beyond, a vision drew near. Accompanied on each side by three lackies in gorgeous, glittering uniforms, each upholding a lighted silver candle the height of his own body, walked Elizabeth Petrovna, a woman of such extraordinary beauty that at first sight it struck the observer with something akin to surprise. Because of illness, she was not wearing the tightly corseted gown of the day. White satin, like a church stole, hung evenly from corsage to floor, unmarred by a circling line. Her arms and shoulders were bare. Inset in the thick satin, as if in resisting metal, were huge sapphires, huge emeralds, each with a tiny rim of gold about it.

This encrustation of gems reached far down the skirt, front and back, and finished in a point. Fabulous pink pearls swung from her ears, circled her neck, and hung in long ropes from her shoulders. Elizabeth Petrovna was tall and of an undreamed of perfection of line. She had large, deep, blue eyes lighted by an enchanting expression of love, sweetness, and languor. She had thick, curling brown hair so beautiful that a court hairdresser could teach it no new grace; a mouth whose endearing sweetness made even bitter commands seem just; hands and arms of unexampled perfection, and a sort of dazzling pallor to emphasize eyes and hair. Old courtiers, who had seen her in her girlhood, said she was what her father's, Peter the Great's, dream of a perfect woman might have been in the days of his own youth. To accompany all, a charm of voice was hers, of personality,— movement — that might not be resisted. She was not only the loveliest woman in Europe, but probably the loveliest that ever graced a throne. She was only in the

early forties now. Age had set no mark upon her. But an illness, which assured speedy death, and which might not be mentioned, had heightened her beauty and lent it a sort of pitiful and tragic power.

She slowly crossed the great glittering room of the reflecting floor to the north side, where a thronelike seat had been prepared for her. As she walked along, without a trace of self-consciousness or personal superiority, glances of love and admiration followed her, and a sort of frightened hush, which was the tribute always paid by the public to the superlative physical perfection of Elizabeth Petrovna.

The Grand Duke hastened to pay his respects to her.

" My dear Aunt," bowing and kissing her hand, " I am flattered that you should honor my poor concert by your presence. I never saw you look in better health than tonight — I rejoice to say."

She looked down from her regal height with a smile that was half pity, half contempt, but altogether tender, upon the poor, thin, ugly body and almost imp-like face that bent before her. She inclined her charming head with its glistening gems near his ear and said in a low voice meant only for him to hear:

" We are pleased, my dear Nephew, that you should remember that November night so long ago, when we did something which we hope you will recall often in the years to come; something that will be of benefit to you — if you happen to rule wisely."

When she straightened up and regained her former position, there were white dots on the smooth brow and throat, and the jewelled hands were unsteady. It was evident what an effort the least motion cost her. In the deep blue eyes — for a moment — there was a hunted look of fear and death.

The Grand Duke made way for the Grand Duchess, whom he did not feel inclined to meet face to face or to speak with just now.

The handsome Greek-Russian violinist, Nicholas Murievich, who was watching the scene from the other end of the room, was surprised to find that the Grand Duchess, whom he had thought a tall woman, was really short when she drew near Elizabeth Petrovna.

Then he saw that she was not even majestic, but that she gave the impression of both height and majesty because she was upheld by an inflexible will.

The new favorite, Count Ivan Shuvalov, who accompanied Elizabeth Petrovna everywhere, drew nearer as he saw the Grand Duchess. She bent low before the Empress and kissed her hand.

" Most Gracious Majesty, I cannot tell you what pleasure it gives me to see you again! It is months since I have had that pleasure. Will your Gracious Majesty not permit me to see you in private in a few days where we can converse as we used to? Believe me, not to see you oftener is my greatest grief."

Elizabeth Petrovna became white as the satin of her stole. She looked at Count Shuvalov as if to beg his intercession and smiled that smile of indescribable and caressing sweetness.

" Your Royal Highness," explained Count Shuvalov, " the November night is peculiarly oppressive, as you yourself have just remarked,— and the heat of all these candles — and the crowd — make her Majesty feel faint. At another time in the evening she will answer you."

When Nicholas Murievich saw her move away unaccompanied by any of the courtiers, he knew that the Empress had refused again her request for an interview.

" Do you see that handsome, black Greek down there

— the famous violinist — your Majesty? " whispered the ever mischief-making Shuvalov, hastily.

The Empress looked as he directed.

" There is a report, your Majesty, that the Grand Duchess is in love with him. Not a thing is known definitely — no fact — but I've heard it hinted. They say — they say — he is her lover."

Elizabeth Petrovna paid no attention to his words. The sins of love were never very important sins to her. A sin, in her opinion, was something altogether different. It was an intrigue, a plotted act of malice against the reign and command of her all-powerful self. Besides, in the crowd that was constantly swaying and increasing in front of her, she saw, making his way toward her, her morganatic husband and former favorite, Count Alexis Razumovsky. He still lived in the white house, which she had given him, adjoining the palace, in the Anicza Garden. This turned her thoughts in a quite different direction. At a sign from her, Count Ivan Shuvalov drew back. The man who approached was tall, slender, and as supple and dark as an Oriental. He had the appearance of great age, but he was really only in the early fifties. He still showed the marks of a rich, semi-oriental beauty, which in the past must have equalled that of Elizabeth Petrovna herself. His face was furrowed now and marked with dissipation and uncontrolled emotions. His dull, black eyes were so weary that they had become sad and indifferent. They looked out upon a world that for him had died. Indian sapphires hung from his ears. Purple-black sapphires marked his thin, long, fingered hands, and all the orders of Russia blazed upon his breast. Count Alexis Razumovsky kissed her hand with an emotion so deep he could not speak. Then, he took his place proudly beside her with his back turned

toward Count Shuvalov who had wisely retreated some distance. Side by side under the crystal chandelier they stood, towering above the other guests, the two finest physical specimens of that old Muscovite Russia that had passed away.

"This day, each year, your Majesty, I keep like a holy day." His voice trembled. Elizabeth Petrovna's mind turned swiftly back toward the past. And what a past it was that swept like a whirlwind through her brain, at sound of that weary voice, that had once whispered passionate words of love to her! The eyes of all the guests were taking frequent and surreptitious glances at the pair, and enjoying the evident discomfiture of Count Shuvalov. It needed only a word, only a gesture from one to the other, between these two, to recall dramatic incidents of their glowing years of life together, when the income of half the world had been theirs to squander.

"Do you remember the golden cross we placed on the top of the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Moscow?" he whispered, when controlled emotion and a little white lozenge he had swallowed permitted calmer speech.

"And the little white house in the Pokrova Street?"

Elizabeth Petrovna did remember very well. In that little house she had married — morganatically — Count Alexis Razumovsky. And in honor of the event she had placed a crown of gold upon the Church of the Resurrection, where Razumovsky had once been a choir boy.

"And the little village, Alexandrovsky — the church there — Alexis Gregorovich?" she replied, with a gayer smile than was customary now. In this little village she had dressed as a boy and had sung in the boys' choir with Razumovsky. This was the way that they first met.

Ah! what a life followed this! She drew a long breath of regret and remembered joy. When they first looked into each other's eyes — in that little village, Alexandrovsky — one day after the church service was over and they were alone,— it was just as if they had always known each other, even from the beginning of time. It was as if there were no barriers between them, no obstacles. It was as if they rushed each to the other, like waves that the winds drive, which have no will.

"And the fairs, Alexis Gregorovich?" the voice was strong and vibrant now as the voice of her youth.

"That was life," he sighed, as his thin hands, on which the huge sapphires shone like the purple midnights of the past, sought again the lozenge box.

In those days Elizabeth Petrovna was in hiding from the envious wrath of Anna Leopoldovna who was reigning Empress. She wore her brown, thick curls short like a boy. She was slender and tall as a pine tree. In boy's disguise no one knew her. She and Alexis Razumovsky went about to the great fairs of central Russia singing and dancing — and gayly taking the money they earned. Her dancing had been a marvel of grace and skill.

Then, came Little Russia and the south. They lived among the peasants. She could ride the wildest steed of the steppe as well as any Cossack from the Dnieper. Or, she played the balalaika for his singing — if the weather was warm,— and they wandered on foot from village to village and the peasants fêted them.

"Power can never equal a life like that!" she exclaimed with conviction, in the old voice he used to know, without troubling however to communicate to him directly the thought that prompted what she said. Her words and voice, and something in the quick turn of her

head, recalled then to him their life in the barracks, in Moscow, and, later, in Petersburg, when they had lived as boon companions with the soldiers. And what a fine appearing soldier she had been! Everyone had been in love with her. When she looked at him, it was almost with surprise at not finding beside her the fiery hearted boy. The eyes that looked back at her were weary and exhausted. The old blaze, that had swept her into oblivious depths of passionate and emotional living, and made the forgetful years swirl about them both unheeding, like dizzy tops, was no more.

"Our conversation must not delay the Grand Duke's concert?" he questioned, in the silence that followed that last look of hers.

She did not dismiss him at once. She faced with a supreme indifference the stolen glances of interest and curiosity turned upon them from moment to moment by the curious crowd. She noticed that Count Shuvalov was talking with Lomonossov, the poet, and his young protégé, Von-Visin, across the room, and that the court was enjoying the temporary displacement of Count Shuvalov. She saw Count Bestushev-Rjumin, the prime minister, enter late, a thin, black, ominous shadow. She thought how she disliked him. She intercepted a look between him and the Grand Duchess, which surprised her.

"I wish, Alexis Gregorovich," she exclaimed in the voice he used to love, "that it was not a concert of court violinists which we were going to listen to to-night together, you and I, but instead a concert of nightingales — *Do you not remember?* — in the meadows of the Ukraine in that old scented garden of the south?"

The last words were said with an underlying meaning intended only for him.

He was not able to reply immediately. The years that lay between the nightingales and the violinists marked that thing most worthy of regret — the vanishing of youth.

"I have brought your Majesty a little gift for to-night, to mark the anniversary of your reign," he said, abruptly; then paused as if unable to go on. He was groping in the inside pocket of his satin court coat, groping with the shaking fingers of an old man. At length he found it. It was a miniature of a slender young girl, in a frame of plain, beveled gold. Elizabeth Petrovna took it in the safe shelter of her lace handkerchief. It showed a girl of some eighteen years. She had pale gray eyes, golden hair, and white, fine, patrician features. The picture resembled the Empress herself, only it lacked her fire, vividness, her deep rich coloring. It was a pale, dull copy.

"I sent to Florence to-night — to be given to her in honor of you, (It was worthy of remark that here he said not your Majesty, but you) a little brooch of gold, a reproduction in miniature of the crown which you placed upon the Cathedral of the Resurrection in Moscow. *But I did not tell her!*" he added in a significant whisper. Count Alexis Razumovsky bowed reverently and moved away. Elizabeth Petrovna scarcely heeded him. She was looking — within the safe shelter of her lace handkerchief — at the first picture she had ever seen of the daughter born so long ago to her and Alexis Razumovsky. She seated herself unsteadily upon the raised dais, which was the signal for the concert to begin and for no one else to be presented to her. Count Shuvalov did not return to his former position by her side. His subtle courtier's instinct told him that it would be best not to. Her ladies-in-waiting took his place.

Nicholas Murievich, slender, dark and young, wearing a court suit of oyster-white satin, the decorations bestowed by kings for his music glittering upon his breast, stepped forth to open the concert. By order of the Grand Duke he played a selection from an old Italian master. And like a master he played himself, nobly, vigorously, sure of technique. To-night he was less absorbed in his music and its success than usual. The thought passed through his mind repeatedly of the futility of playing to this crowd of bored and blasé beings. They had arranged themselves in little friendly and agreeable groups to listen to the music. He saw the Grand Duchess with her friend, Princess Dashkov, and Count Shuvalov, and Leo Narishkin, the court merrymaker. Ah! — he thought — Shuvalov knew the Empress could not live long and he would not mind being the favorite of the Grand Duchess when she became the new Empress!

Elizabeth Petrovna was distrait and did not pay attention to what was being played. Her thoughts were turned inward upon herself. Her eyes seemed to be riveted upon the lace handkerchief which she held in her lap. Count Alexis Razumovsky, who was a musician himself and a most appreciative listener, had gone. He never stayed long enough to be numbered among the servile, bowing crowd that paid respect to the withdrawal of Elizabeth Petrovna and the new favorite. Old Lomonossov had a crowd of young Russian men about him, officers and scholars. He saw the tall, thin-legged Dershawin, boyish Von-Visin, and the black eyed, melancholy face of young Novikov, both incipient poets. Subanski, who was nicknamed Adonis, handsome Gregory Orlov, and his giant brother, Alexis, whose face showed a saber wound from chin to ear, were frankly bored.

The Grand Duke and Elizabeth Woronzov, who had

already usurped the place of the Grand Duchess in the heart of the Grand Duke, the heir apparent to the throne, were at a distance from the others and alone. Murievich saw the Grand Duke signal imperatively to her to keep still, and he saw his ugly insipid face change from moment to moment and become almost fine at times, as emotion induced by the music moulded it. For a second number, Nicholas Murievich played a composition of his own. As he began it, he fixed his eyes upon the Grand Duchess as much as to say that this was his farewell to Russia, and to her. Elizabeth Petrovna felt some fresh emotion in the music, and looked up quickly. Who in all Europe was so fitted to judge of the things of love as she? She saw the look in the eyes of Nicholas Murievich as they rested upon Catherine Alexevna, and the whispered words of Count Shuvalov occurred to her. Her eyes rested rovingly a moment upon the bent, narrow shouldered, somewhat helpless figure of her nephew, and a flitting sense of pity and premonition of future possibilities touched her.

Nicholas Murievich still held his eyes turned in the direction of Catherine Alexevna, and it occurred to him that her face resembled strangely another face that he had seen once in court surroundings just like this. Where was it? Where was it? And whose was the face? Ah! — he knew now! A happy musical phrase had found it. She resembled Frederick the Great. If Frederick the Great and she were of the same age, the resemblance would be truly wonderful. Here was the same somewhat long chin, a similar color and expression of the eyes. And the thin noses were very similar. In short, there was that peculiar likeness which usually means kinship of blood.

But Catherine Alexevna was not moved by his music.

She was less moved than any one else who was present. She could not feel it. She could understand only the things of the head, not the heart. She did not know that he was playing to her. For a moment he was sad; he sensed that she could never feel any purely beautiful thing. Then he remembered, as if by magic, that she could not learn to quote correctly a single line of poetry because she had no ear for rhythm. What was it then that fascinated him so, who loved music above everything? It was the force of opposites. It was some power purely physical, the attraction of antagonistic entities. It was something related to superabundant vitality and the cold, alien powers of the mind.

But the Grand Duke understood what she did not. This puzzling man, in the awkward, unlovely body, whom he himself was betraying and plotting against, was the only one present who listened to great music like a connoisseur. In musical comprehension he rose head and shoulders above them all. This complex and doubtful self-questioning was audible in the last minor notes of his playing which did not bring the quick and vigorous applause which was usually his. He sat down with a futile sense of falsity and failure.

When the Grand Duke, who came next, lifted the violin to his chin, he became firm-bodied and commanding. The shifting gray eyes, that looked as if they were flecked with fretful tears, were stern and dominant. With a strong arm of hate he cut the strings, with a dash of fiery tone that cut his hearer's hearts. Again, again, that wound of sound, until the room was emotionally subdued. He wielded the fiddle bow as his imperial grandfathers, Peter the Great of Russia and Charles XII of Sweden, had wielded the baton of death over conquering and triumphant armies. That struggling, timid, shifting na-

ture of his, which could not express itself in words, because there was no tongue he could speak well, French, German, Swedish or Russian, and call his own, poured itself out through the medium of his violin in a torrent of rage and revenge. He had forgotten all about his audience. What did they matter? From the height upon which he was standing they were small and insignificant.

The blasé courtiers became uncomfortable. Even fat, phlegmatic Panin, who never arose from his bed before five in the afternoon, he who in that talkative, sentimental, self-expressive age was always silent, looked up with a show of interest. Old, black-clad Count Bestushev-Rjumin, of the deep set, cruel eyes, realized that there was a world where even he of the astute and wily brain would not dare measure himself with the Grand Duke whom he did not hesitate to call a fool. There were evidently other worlds besides the one over which he ruled superbly. But it all ended with the last stroke of the bow. Before them stood, then, a one-sided, narrow-chested, crumpled little figure, in blue coat, white trousers, and a wig too large by half for the head it covered. The wig shaded a sharp little nose that stuck out like the snout of a weasel.

The Empress arose. There was a rush toward well known courtiers of people who wished to be presented to her. Count Bestushev-Rjumin hastily and briefly paid his respects to her and moved away. Lomonossov of the great burly body and uncourtly voice besieged Count Ivan Shuvalov to present to her his two young friends, Von-Visin and Dershawin, and ask her Majesty that they might have some appointment to help support them. Lomonossov assured him that they would be writers of whom Russia would one day be proud. Count Shuvalov would not even listen, and old Lomonossov turned away

grumbling as usual, declaring that everyone had a chance in Russia except the Russians.

The ladies-in-waiting signified that her Majesty would permit no one else to be presented to her. The Grand Duchess started toward her to wish her good night, and again to ask for the desired interview. When she was a few feet from her, Count Shuvalov intercepted her. But for an instant's space these two women, around whom at this moment the Slavic world revolved, stood facing each other separated by only a few feet in space, in a sort of imperial isolation.

The scornful Esterhazy, who had the subtle, time-registering eye of an historian, who saw them across the shining, smooth-floored salon, whispered hastily to the French Ambassador, Marquis de l'Hôpital: "Look — see the two of them now! One represents Byzantium and the East; the other a prosaic, modern world soon to come."

"Observe Lomonossov, and that awkward, brown-eyed, moon-faced boy with him — Von-Visin," whispered back Marquis de l'Hôpital, delightedly. "Are they not two polar bears? Do you know, Esterhazy, that in the souls of these Russians who are trying so hard to Frenchify themselves — to be of our world of the west — there is something vast and lonely, and that can not be disciplined?"

The Empress was passing them now on her way to her apartments, followed by her ladies-in-waiting and Count Ivan Shuvalov and there was silence and reverently bowed heads as she moved along. After the great south doors closed upon the departure of her Majesty, a different temper was felt in the rooms. The Grand Duke moved about nimbly from group to group. He was in one of his scornful, tantalizing moods. His sharp, harsh,

nasal voice was heard everywhere, riding upon the surfaces of other voices with which it did not blend. He stuck the sharp prick of his tongue into every one he hated. And in the words he uttered there was a peculiar mingling of pure foolishness, inanity, and shrewd penetration. Sometimes this unexpected penetration laid bare facts so carefully concealed that no one had suspected them.

Gregory Orlov, tall, handsome, with masses of golden, curling hair, his superb athletic figure buttoned into a tight fitting, braided uniform, was talking with the Grand Duchess. He was trying to penetrate beneath the jesting surface of her conversation. He was trying to make her see him, the man.

"Your Royal Highness," called Gregory Orlov to the Grand Duke who happened to be passing near, "cannot the Grand Duchess ever be serious?"

"Very serious, Orlov!" was the quick reply. "She is seriously deceiving you and me, and our famous violinist over there, all at one time. What is that but serious?"

On past them his one-sided body hopped, like a petulant bird, to Lomonossov and the Russians. Into them he stuck his hateful tongue and promised to import some Prussians who would teach them how to write poetry.

"How are you, Subanski? How are you?" his harsh voice called unexpectedly from another part of the room. "I've passed you two or three times to-night, Subanski, but I did not speak because I thought that you were just one of the statues brought in to help decorate the rooms."

"Good evening, Princess Dashkov! Good evening. We seldom see you among our *personal* friends. I suppose we are not clever enough for you."

"Good evening, Count Bestushev-Rjumin," appearing

as if by magic beside the Great Chancellor. "Where is our faded beau and beauty, Razumovsky, Count Bestushev?"

"He has gone, your Royal Highness."

"Ah! — Count Bestushev — that must so often be said about *old* men," not attempting to veil the hatred that rang in his voice, which this time was accompanied by a burst of shrill and foolish laughter.

The Great Chancellor regarded him in silent disdain, making no attempt to measure words with him.

"*Ah-h-ha!* our silent Panin,— who plots and plans and smiles and *says* — nothing."

As Catherine Alexevna watched him flutter about the gorgeous room, so busily devoted to creating discomfort and displeasure, she thought that in just this way he moved across the gorgeous pageant of the age — like a gray, ungainly phantom of unstable smoke, wavering, uncertain, and so badly fitted into his visible clothes of flesh.

The guests were leaving. They were eager to escape from the ill-tempered mood of their capricious host.

The Petersburg that met their eyes outside on this sad November midnight was a veritable ghost of a city, because street after street of dwellings was covered with raw, unpainted scaffolding where building was rapidly going on. White scaffolding covered the entire outside of the new Winter Palace which was nearly finished, and the great Isaac's Cathedral which was being rebuilt. From the soul-submerging, semi-oriental splendor of the interior of the palace, they were confronted as soon as they stepped outside the door, by a sad, sullen, sub-Arctic landscape, where nature had muted her joy, and which touched them to silent dismay. Not yet did the streets of this pet city of Peter own any of the mysterious, com-

plex charm of other world-cities, which made life here altogether an indoor affair.

Count Bestushev-Rjumin seized the moment of confusion caused by the departure of the guests to speak a few words with Catherine Alexevna. They exchanged at first the usual commonplaces. Then he became silent and fixed his deep-set glowing eyes upon her. Slowly there was borne in upon her mind a conviction, a thought, that he knew that later in the night she was to keep an appointment with Nicholas Murievich. She felt that the knowledge displeased him. She had become increasingly conscious of some inexplicable power he possessed of divining the thoughts of other people. Over that cold mind of hers he had some influence that no one else had ever had, and which she herself could not explain or understand. There was something about him that had the power to negative her other impulses.

"It is said, Catherine Alexevna," he began in a tone of cold displeasure, "that November is an unlucky month — a month in which especially to avoid doing unwise things." He looked at her sidewise, his thin, witch-like arms folded high.

She did not reply. And he did not speak again at once; when he did, it was to remark apparently apropos of nothing:

"By marriage — if not by blood — you are a Romanoff, you must remember."

Evidently he was following a line of thought known only to himself, of which only the upper edge would be made visible. Here he sighed and drew a deep breath, and then seemed to make an effective frame out of the silence that followed for his next words, to which he was slow to give utterance.

"November! Ah! — what have they not done — the

nights of late autumn, to the fate-haunted Romanoffs! Consider!"

The word fell like a weight of lead.

"Consider! — Peter, Catherine the First, Anna Leopoldovna, poor Ivan — now in prison in Schlüsselberg — and her Majesty, Elizabeth Petrovna. Good and evil! Good and evil! But always something important. The Romanoffs surely have cause to remember them — the fateful nights of autumn." He did not wait for her reply. He kissed her hand and was gone.

After the guests had all left, Catherine Alexevna saw the Grand Duke cross the far end of the room where the musicians had been stationed. He was walking rapidly, but he was bent almost double, his nose sticking out sharply, and his mind so intent upon something known only to himself that he made an impression that was uncanny.

In the apartments of her Majesty, they were dining, Elizabeth Petrovna and Count Ivan Shuvalov. This was the regular dinner hour, some time after midnight or in the early morning. Count Shuvalov found the imperial woman who had honored him with her preference peculiarly difficult to-night. Was it possible, he questioned himself, that in that long conversation which she had had with Alexis Razumovsky and which he had not been able to overhear, the former favorite had scored so heavily that he was going to be reinstated? And what was it that he had given her which had affected her so deeply? He had not been able to see at the time. Then, he envied the past that had been theirs together. Surely, Razumovsky had had all the best of it. Nothing but the ashes of love had been left for him. He was really only the lover of the dead, he thought, as he glanced at the passionless, gemmed idol of a woman who sat

opposite him, without seeming to know that he was there. What was it that Razumovsky gave her that she put hastily under lock and key as soon as they entered her apartments? Elizabeth Petrovna was distrait and could not eat. With that caressing smile and voice which had certain notes that struck the heart and which no one could resist, she dismissed him as soon as dinner was over, and called for her women. After they had disrobed her for the night, she unwrapped a prayer-book and read from it. Then she took an icon, placed it upon a little stand and knelt reverently in front of it. When she arose from her nightly prayer, she dismissed her women. She waited expectantly, with inclined and listening head, until she heard the fast foot-fall fade into silence. Then she crossed the room and lifted a curtain that hung against the wall. This curtain concealed another room that adjoined her sleeping chamber. In this room — which was small — there was no furniture, no ornaments. At one end of it there was a raised platform of white marble. Upon this platform stood the marble Venus which her father, Peter the Great, had had brought from Greece and placed at Gatschina in his pleasure garden which he called his Isle of Love.

Elizabeth Petrovna prostrated herself upon the floor before it, and her lips moved in inspired prayer for the marble figure to give back to her the things of the past, the things over which she had reigned superbly — love, youth, beauty,— and adventure and joy. She gave herself over freely to that pagan idolatry which so scandalized her attendants and which was now whispered freely about the court.

When at length she went to bed, the old manservant, who had guarded her since her accession to the throne, took his accustomed place upon the bare floor in front of

her bed, where he slept. But to-night Elizabeth Petrovna herself could not sleep. At length, when the dull, Arctic day was painting ghastly lines around the windows, she reached out and touched him.

"Get up! Go to the market corner and bring me the woman who tells stories. You know the one I mean! Tell her I cannot sleep! I want her to tell me of her Cossack people — of the gardens of the Ukraine in spring — and the nightingales. Be quick!"

Count Alexis Razumovsky, in the little wooden house in the faded Anicza Garden, adjoining the palace, who spent the evening alone, regretting the rival who had supplanted him, did not know how successfully he had scored that night.

As soon as Catherine Alexevna reached her own rooms, she hastily took down a long, white cloak-like cape of wool, provided with an enveloping hood for the head, called *barbare,* and under it concealed herself and her court dress. She took two bags from a chest, bags so heavy that none but a muscular woman like her could carry them, and called Dsiemba, her faithful Calmuck. They set out together as fast as they could walk for the Admiralty Meadow. When they reached the edge of it, Nicholas Murievich, in a black cloak, was awaiting them. The old Calmuck seated himself on the ground at a respectful distance, out of range of hearing.

With an almost boyish enthusiasm Nicholas Murievich flung his arms about Catherine Alexevna, without speaking, and held her close. She was the first to sever the embrace. It occurred to him upon the moment that she was always the first to do this. Was it because love was less necessary to her, he wondered?

"I have brought the money," were her first words, placing the heavy bags upon the ground beside them.

Again, paying no attention to the money, as to a thing inconsequential, he put his young, impassioned arms about her and drew her toward him. His mind forecasted sadly the future, the long months to come when he could not see her. Then he realized how powerful was the physical body of this woman whom he held in his arms. He could feel it now. He could feel the steady nerves of steel. It was this combination that gave her power, not the delicacy of esthetic sensibility. Then, he wondered that these qualities continued to attract him. But he forgot this soon in the fact that the woman in his arms was young and good to look upon, and that they were alone in the night, and he loved her.

"This is what I wish you to do for me, Nicholas Murievich," she replied, in answer to his repeated questions. "I wish you to find out what is the opinion of the foreign courts about me. How strong I am? Am I more popular than the Grand Duke? I wish to know the truth — the exact truth. It is necessary for me to know it. And you are the only person in the world upon whom I can depend to find out and to tell me. Now do not spare my feelings in reporting. When the final struggle comes I wish to know just what part the different ministers who are accredited here are to play. An exact knowledge of how I really stand with foreign courts will strengthen me. I must have it!

"In addition I cannot get out of Russia, to travel, to see the world — to learn — I wish you to be eyes for me! I wish you to see everything! I wish you to tell me everything! There is nothing too insignificant for me to be interested in!

"It is enough to make me a dolt, an idiot, to be shut up in one country, like a prisoner. I wish to be better informed about Paris than the French ambassador him-

self. Do not spare couriers and, therefore, expense. Here is gold! With it you can line the road from Petersburg to Paris with them to satisfy my curiosity." She touched one of the heavy bags with a blue, satin slippered foot. "In addition, I must know the truth about my mother, her affairs, her health. They keep the true conditions from me. Is she provided with money? Does Elizabeth Petrovna still continue her allowance from the crown? Or is she penniless?"

"Now that the war with Prussia has commenced, and the usual highway is not accessible, your Royal Highness, I am going direct from here to Warsaw. That is the safest road now, and quickest, too, to Paris. And you may be assured that I shall perform your commissions faithfully."

"I hate to have you go, Nicholas Murievich!" she exclaimed, with an unaccustomed burst of emotion. "We are making history here now so fast, no one can predict what will have happened before your return. Life will be increasingly difficult, too, for me."

He forgot his discontent over the futile concert and his own part in it which had displeased him. He thought only of her. That tremendous physical power which was hers had swept him into forgetfulness of self and established her greater claim to his life and pleasure. Now he thought only of her. How many times this same thing had happened when they had met! An emotion passed over him that made him tremble at the thought that he must leave her, that this night would be the last for months.

The four rows of leafless lindens along the Nevsky Prospect were beginning to show against the sky. The gold, pointed tower of the Admiralty looked like a new constellation swinging up into sight out of the unknown.

"The horses are awaiting me, Catherine Alexevna! There is no more time. Day will soon be here. Good-by! Good-by! Be careful — there is much to fear!" catching her in his arms and kissing her again and again.

On her way back to the Anicza Palace —in order to shorten the distance — she walked along the edge of the pond, and the river, and saw, just before she turned the corner to the palace entrance, far, gleaming patches of cold, sleeping water, to which in an hour, day would bring the disconcerting blaze of steel.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERVIEW

"Your Royal Highness," exclaimed Catherine Ivanovna Shargorodskaia, the favorite lady-in-waiting, "you must take some rest! You have paced the floor the entire day! You have eaten no food! You cannot go on like this! It will kill you!"

"I know it, Catherine Ivanovna. But one cannot always do what is wise. Sometimes one does not know what to do."

"You are losing flesh every day. You will die if you do not put an end to this worry."

"But if I cannot succeed in seeing her Majesty and in talking with her, there is no knowing what will happen. The faction against me is increasing — in number and strength. If I cannot put a stop to it soon, I may be imprisoned. It may even be worse than that. Who knows? Terrible things happen here —"

"Let me consult my uncle, the confessor of your Royal Highness, Feodor Jakovlovich Dubansky. I will talk with him. I will explain everything. I will tell him what you wish. In this way a reconciliation may be effected — and very soon, too."

"Perhaps, Catherine Ivanovna, that is best. I confess I do not know what to do myself. Almost all my friends — and my servants — have been sent to Siberia, except you. Go,— see your uncle. It can do no harm."

Catherine Ivanovna hastily bowed, casting a sympathetic look toward her mistress, and left the room.

The Grand Duchess continued her nervous pacing of the room, pausing occasionally at a window to look out upon the early winter night, and tap with her fingers upon the cold pane. At eleven o'clock Catherine Ivanovna returned and the expression of her face showed that she did not consider that her journey had been a failure.

" My uncle says, Your Royal Highness, for you to undress, get into bed and feign illness. Then, ask for a priest, and send for him. He will be dressed and waiting for the message. He will come immediately. Then he will go directly from you to her Majesty and give your message to her. He cannot be forbidden entrance to her Majesty by Count Shuvalov, because he is a priest, and he would not dare forbid him."

The Grand Duchess took the advice of her favorite lady-in-waiting, Catherine Ivanovna. She undressed and went to bed.

As soon as the news of her illness spread abroad there was consternation in the palace. Feet could be heard running in all directions. There was a murmur of voices like buzzing of bees. These were always the busiest hours of life under the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, the small black hours of the early morning, here where the marking of time was so upset that no one seemed ever to go to bed.

The news of the illness spread like wildfire. Lackies, attendants, ladies- and gentlemen-in-waiting, were flying about through the long chill corridors. When the Grand Duke and Elizabeth Woronzov heard it, they could not conceal their satisfaction. Elizabeth Woronzov was congratulated. She hastened to send word of the serious illness by one of her personal attendants to her uncle, the vice-chancellor. She at once took on the airs of an Empress.

The palace was shaken with excitement, and the priest was obliged to make his way through a greedy-eyed, gossiping, constantly increasing crowd, to the door of the apartments occupied by the Grand Duchess. When the crowd in the corridors found that the priest had been with the Grand Duchess for an hour, they were sure that she was going to die and the opposing faction was elated.

"Feodor Jakovlovich Dubansky," began Catherine Alexevna, "I wish you to go to her Majesty to-night and tell her that I sent you. I wish you to beg her to permit me to return forever to my home in Prussia. After you have communicated this to her, judge of its effect upon her, and then try to arrange for me to be admitted to see her to-night. If I wait until to-morrow or another night, for the interview, it may be too late and I may be imprisoned, or publicly divorced, and Elizabeth Woronzov put in my place. Be sure to impress upon her mind that I am eager to return to my country and my home."

The priest went directly to the apartments of her Majesty. In a few moments he returned with the good news that her Majesty had graciously consented to the interview. Catherine Alexevna expressed her gratitude to the priest for what he had done for her, and directed Catherine Ivanovna to call her women and tell them to bring a court robe and her jewels.

"I must dress to please her Majesty. That is important, Catherine Ivanovna. Every one who approaches her Majesty now that she is so ill, must be dressed in the latest fashion of France. This living up to the frivolities gives her courage and the illusion that she is not going to die. She feels that they keep death off. Bring me the pink-flowered brocade — the one with interwoven gold figures, and my turquoises. Bring also my powdered, high court-wig, as if for a presentation."

At two o'clock in the morning Count Alexis Shuvalov called for her and announced that her Majesty would graciously see her, at once.

The spacious apartments of her Majesty, in which gold glittered everywhere, were empty and lonely. It seemed to Catherine Alexevna, as she entered, that it was sadder to die amid splendor than amid poverty. One felt more the last triumphant sting of material things. There was not a soul in the great anteroom, which in former days of health was filled with a jostling, noisy throng of courtiers. Catherine Alexevna had never seen it empty before. It made her realize afresh how serious was the condition of her Majesty, and how near the end must be when she, who had loved gayety and dissipation, was neglected and alone. She could hear the bleak December wind beating against the windows and the stinging rainfall. She shivered at thought of the versts of blackness that lay outside.

As she approached the passage that led to the room in which her Majesty was awaiting her, she saw the Grand Duke, standing in court attire in an opposite door. She thought: "He has gone in ahead of me. It was Count Shuvalov, of course, who arranged for that."

Her Majesty was standing to receive her. Catherine Alexevna threw herself upon the floor at her feet.

"I have come to implore your Majesty to send me back to my home! This is not affectation on my part. I assure you that I am sick of it all. It is dwarfing my heart. It is dwarfing my soul. I am sick of living in a gilded prison. It is killing my normal self. It is developing in me terrible powers. I can see it now. But if I stay here, the time will come when I cannot see it."

Elizabeth Petrovna, who seemed more grieved than angry, motioned her to arise. But she still remained at her feet.

"How can I let you go?" she replied in a voice in which there was only kindness. "Have you forgotten that you have children?"

"My children are in your Majesty's hands. They could not be in better ones."

"But what excuse shall I give to the world?"

"If your Majesty should find it best, tell the real causes that have given rise to the displeasure of your Majesty, and that of the Grand Duke, your nephew."

"But where will you find the means to live upon with your family?"

"I shall accommodate myself to the life I knew before your Majesty did me the honor to bring me to Russia."

"But your mother is in exile. She had to flee from Prussia. She is in Paris."

"I know that, your Majesty. She was so devoted to your interests and to mine, that she drew upon herself the displeasure of Frederick the Great!" Again Elizabeth Petrovna commanded the Grand Duchess to arise. This time she obeyed.

Elizabeth Petrovna became meditative and walked about the floor. They were in a long, narrow room with three windows in a row, against which they could hear the black rain beating. Between the windows, all along that side of the room, stood small mahogany tables littered with the gold gem-studded toilet articles of her Majesty. The fretful candles struck from them points of vari-tinted flame.

Besides Catherine Alexevna and her Majesty, Count Alexis Shuvalov and the Grand Duke were present. In one corner of the room a huge, green silk umbrella was spread to conceal a small Turkish divan, and here Count Ivan Shuvalov was hidden so that he could listen, unseen, to the conversation.

Catherine Alexevna was shocked by the appearance of Elizabeth Petrovna. Her face was eloquent with beauty and with death. And she was ablaze with gems. She wore a plain gown of bright blue silk velvet, with a long court train. From it her arms and shoulders shone white and fine. Over her shoulders and falling to the floor, hung an oriental scarf of white gauze embroidered thickly with diamonds. The mass of shaking curls on the top of her head was twined and held in place by a rope of diamonds. It was as if from their fictitious fire she longed to draw back to herself the old mad passion of life which she felt to be slipping away. Catherine Alexevna knew that there was not another figure in Europe to compare in beauty and majesty with Elizabeth Petrovna. And now the approach of death had given her face a splendor that was almost terrifying. In her heart she had always loved her, her beauty and her charm.

Catherine Alexevna walked across to the toilet table which stood nearest to the door by which she had entered. Upon it was a tall vase of silver chiseled by that accomplished artist in metals, Paul Lamerie. In this vase were letters. The Empress came over to where she was standing.

"God is my witness, Catherine Alexevna, that at the time of your illness, when you first came to Russia, I wept a good deal. If I had not loved you, I should not have kept you."

"I thank your Majesty for all that you have done for me. I shall never forget your kindness. Your displeasure is the misfortune of my life." Her Majesty came nearer.

"You are amazing proud. Do you remember how once in the Summer Garden I asked you if you had a pain in your neck because you did not greet me?"

"Ah! my God, your Majesty, how could you believe that I could be proud to you? I swear that I never suspected for a moment what that question meant four years ago."

All the time the Empress was talking with Catherine Alexevna, the Grand Duke was whispering with Count Alexis Shuvalov. They were standing in the center of the room so no one could hear distinctly what they said because the room was so large. At last the Grand Duke lost his temper and exclaimed in a loud and angry voice:

"She is just as ugly tempered as she can be! And she is stubborn, too!"

Then Catherine Alexevna knew that they were talking of her.

"I rejoice to have an opportunity to say in the presence of her Majesty, that I am only angry at them who advise you to be unjust to me. And that I am stubborn because I have found that yielding to you makes you hate me."

The Grand Duke listened and then addressed her Majesty:

"Now, your Majesty can see! Now, your Majesty can hear from her own words how ugly tempered she is! That is not all, your Majesty. She is carrying on all kinds of intrigues. And she is so clever that no one finds her out. She has been plotting with Count Bestushev for a year to be made regent and displace me. Your Majesty cannot guess the things that she is up to! The night I gave my concert — in November — she met Nicholas Murievich after the concert was over, in the Admiralty Meadow. They were together there a long time — *alone*. She is paying his expenses this winter in Paris — as a spy — and in other cities. I do not suppose that your Majesty will believe this, because none of you ever believe anything I say. But it is a fact and I know it.

I tell you she is plotting with that old fox, Count Bestushev right along — and the plotting is not for anyone's good but her own. Your Majesty may be sure of that!" he exclaimed in a fresh burst of anger.

Upon the Empress, who was a clever woman, the words had a different impression from that which the Grand Duke intended them to have. Although she had made up her mind to be stern with the Grand Duchess, and although she had been urged by others to be stern with her, she was becoming gentler and gentler.

"But you do meddle in affairs that do not concern you," continued the Empress, ignoring the indiscreet disclosures of the Grand Duke in regard to Count Bestushev and Nicholas Murievich.

"How did you dare send a command to Field Marshal Aprakin?"

"I? I never dreamed of doing such a thing!"

"How can you deny that you have written to him? Your letter is in that vase," pointing with her finger to the superb piece of metal work of Paul Lamerie.

"You know that I have forbidden you to write letters of any kind."

"That is true, your Majesty. I overstepped your command. I humbly beg your Majesty's pardon. Since my letter is there, your Majesty can see that I sent him no command. I merely said how people in Petersburg were judging his actions."

"But why did you write to him?"

"Because I like him and have an interest in him. I begged him to fulfill your Majesty's commands."

"Count Bestushev says that there were many letters."

"If Count Bestushev says that, he lies."

"Good! Then I will put him to the torture!"

Count Alexis Shuvalov and the Grand Duke looked up

with delight. They stopped whispering and listened. Their eyes shone with malice and anticipated pleasure.

With this threat the Empress thought to terrify Catherine Alexevna into foolish speaking. She was mistaken. Although her heart shook within her, she made herself appear calm and indifferent. She knew that it was the only way to save him. She replied carelessly:

"That is as your Majesty wishes. It is in your Majesty's power to do whatever is right."

At this Elizabeth Petrovna became silent and meditative and walked about the room again. Then she began to talk upon indifferent subjects, now to the Grand Duke, now to Count Alexis Shuvalov. Her anger was gone. She was only grieved now. It was evident that she believed that the Grand Duke wished to pick a quarrel, which was a favorite amusement with him. She understood his unstable nature. At length she walked close to Catherine Alexevna and whispered to her:

"I have much to say to you. But I cannot say it now," looking about to indicate the presence of the others and that she did not wish to speak more before them. Catherine Alexevna replied likewise in a whisper: "I, too, cannot speak before them, although I desire to speak with you greatly. I wish to show you all my heart."

These words impressed her. They brought the tears to her eyes. In order to conceal her emotion Elizabeth Petrovna sent her away:

"It is getting late, Catherine Alexevna. It is four o'clock a good half hour ago. I am hungry. This is my dinner hour."

She held out her hand for Catherine Alexevna to kiss, and patted her head tenderly as she bent in homage before her.

After the Grand Duchess reached her own apartments,

Count Alexis Shuvalov entered and said that her Majesty graciously sent a goodnight greeting.

" Tell her Majesty," was the reply, " that I thank her for her kindness. Tell her I await with eagerness the privilege of seeing her again."

Catherine Alexevna knew that for to-night she had conquered. But she also knew that it could not last. Her Majesty was ill. Her Majesty had no will of her own. She was surrounded by envious, self-seeking courtiers. Another palace revolution was on the way. There was no one who could not see it coming.

CHAPTER III

NICHOLAS MURIEVICH, GREEK MUSICIAN AND PATRIOT, AND CATHERINE ALEXEVNA, GRAND DUCHESS OF RUSSIA — THEIR LETTERS

PARIS.

I am sensible of the great honor your Royal Highness has done me by commissioning me, an humble musician and artist, unskilled in diplomacy and the speech of courts, to feel the pulse of the European capitals, and to keep you informed of their attitude toward yourself in this present crisis.

If you could be in my position but one day you would be as firmly convinced of the need of such service (toward which your own sure intelligence guided you) as you may be of my faithfulness and devotion in performing it.

The court of Russia holds the eyes of the world. It is the stage upon which the drama is being enacted which will remake the boundaries of the continent, and in time create a new and a different civilization. And the two people whom Europe is watching in this world-struggle, the two who will make the decisive throw in the game, are your Royal Highness and the Russian Chancellor, Count Bestushev-Rjumin. You two decide the fate of Russia — and of Europe.

Your Royal Highness cannot imagine from your isolated city by the banks of the Neva, how determined are the powers to keep Russia out of the struggle, to push her back into Asia, to direct her energy toward the East.

In order to do this the efforts of the diplomats is to control you and banish Count Bestushev-Rjumin. Then, it would be easy. The Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna, is ill and cannot live. The Grand Duke Peter is regarded as little better than an idiot. In addition, he hates Russia. His sympathies are Prussian. If you and Count Bestushev-Rjumin could be disposed of, victory would come. Russia would be forced to give up her new capital, Petersburg. She would turn back toward Asia from which she has emerged with so much difficulty.

Count Bestushev cannot, of course, keep his policy secret. He is in a position where he must act, and, from time to time, expose his hand. But you are under no such necessity. You can keep them in doubt as to where you stand so no one will dare openly to act against you.

I am grateful to your Royal Highness for giving me an opportunity to see life from another viewpoint than that of musician and entertainer. This game of politics, in which men place life against the game, is setting its fascination upon me. I realize now the difficulty of your position and how prudent you must be. There can be no false steps. Not every one has opportunity to play for a crown!

The only thing that contributes to mar my happiness — in a measure, of course, compensated by the fact that I still serve you — is that our old life of pleasant companionship is interrupted. The thought that sustains me is that it will be taken up again later, when you are free of this complicating political tangle and mistress of yourself — and Russia.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

My dearest Nicholas:

(Ah! — I wish now that you were not named for a

Russian saint, you, who resemble a Greek faun, or some younger brother of Pan!) You do not? But you certainly do! The lines of your face are slanting and pointed! Amber colored, slantwise eyes. Brown skin. And I verily believe pointed ears! I must make sure of that when I see you.

It is a pleasure for me to write to you, to say anything I wish, I who am surrounded by etiquette and restraint, and to feel that my words are falling into the forgetful ears of a faun of long ago, who hates affairs, politics and intrigue, and loves only life and love.

We are having the gayest of winters — balls, masks, theaters. The Empress wishes to die to the tune of gayety to which she has lived. Therefore, her illness is not mentioned and things move on as if it were not. We dance night after night until day. There is not another woman at court who can dance so long as I. Last week there was a wager as to which could dance longer, the wife of the ambassador from Holland or I. I won, of course, and danced on after she was exhausted. Yet my heart is not in this merriment — although I enjoy it. It is as if there were two women within me living two separate lives. And they take turn about in watching the other. You remember we have spoken of this before. And neither of these women feels at home in the life she is leading. Then again, it is as if it were a play upon a stage and did not matter. I am surprised at the importance people attach to life. I should be unhappy indeed if I thought anything mattered, or that we could help ourselves. I could not watch the picture then with such interest and such indifference.

During the long nights of this winter when I have been dancing gayly, perhaps in the arms of some one who, for the moment, pleased me, what do you suppose it was that

was giving me pleasure? Not the man? No! Nor the music! I hate music. It was the thought of how the light was streaming from our windows and streaking snows that reach unbroken to the Pole. The contrast bit my soul with pleasure. The nearness of our frivolity to the silent, deadly things, the presence of the Polar night, are among the influences that make us live with such unreckoning madness.

The houses are so frail, too, against this torrent of cold! Just wooden structures, so loosely built the wind blows through them, and sometimes the rain. The stoves fill the rooms with smoke. There are holes in the floor one can look through. There is no *raison* in Russia. The lack of it affects every one. It is bringing about a change in me. I can see it! It is making me lose sense of reality. I am unable to get the certainty of anything. It tortures me that I cannot make real this life that flits past me. I fear because of this, Nicholas Murievich, as time goes on, that I may do things that will make my other self and the world shudder. And the things I do will not be evil. It will only be saying B after one has said A.

The upper classes have lived gayly this winter. That is because they feel danger near. They act like children showing off at school. And we have had such a passion for fruit and flowers! To go into the home of any of my friends is like entering a tropic wilderness. Some have had the stairways covered with growing ivy; orchids hanging from the walls, and roses, lilies, azaleas, hyacinths, until the wet, hot air was unbreatheable. You cannot picture such profusion of flowers outside the southern seas. Every one has prided himself upon having in bloom the most fragile flowers of the south! Think of it! In this Arctic wilderness! In this Finnish village!

We have been growing grapes and strawberries in our cellars. What do you think of that? I tell it to you that you may wish sometime to spend a winter in Russia, for winter is the time to visit us. It is our *belle saison.* And the strawberries are white like snowballs! And so are the grapes. They are like Russian beauties — hothouse growths that do not see the sun. I go out-of-doors every day, but the Russian belles do not — except Princess Dashkov. And they look like Dresden figurines. But the poor have suffered this winter in Russia, Nicholas Murievich. Food has never been so high. A pound of tea of the cheapest costs two and a half rubles; a bunch of wood, one ruble and sixty copecks; and a *pud* of meal twenty-six copecks. It costs a fortune for a doctor to make a visit. Her Majesty pays fifteen thousand rubles a year just to heat her curling iron! And forty thousand rubles for her samovar! How can the poor be expected to live or to keep warm?

My dearest Nicholas Murievich, your letters are a comfort to me, just as you yourself are. As I write, I can see your slanting amber eyes and red, red mouth, as I have seen them beside me in the dusk. May their sweet warmth continue to be the one reality in this barren land where nothing else is real save the shadow of immensity.

C. A.

PARIS.

Yesterday, in my capacity of musician and artist, I played at Madame Geofrin's, where, as you know, may be met the brains and beauty of Paris. Russia was on every tongue. No one paid attention to me. They talked freely, although they knew I spent the summers of several years in Russia. It did not occur to them a musician could know anything about anything save music.

I enjoyed hearing these frivolous French women with their fragile graces, in their blue and gold salons, talk of your tragic country of cold and cruelty. The contrast pleased me. Your Highness will be amused at the idea these petted dolls of fashion have of your Russia; an idea in which, to be sure, there is truth — as there is in everything — but which, on the whole, is exaggerated. Yet the conversation was merry — even brilliant — and worth repeating. French women's tongues hit the heart of truth. But then one always hears good things at Madame Geofrin's.

Russia — they agreed — breeds monsters (your Royal Highness will understand that these are not opinions of my own. I am quoting, more or less verbatim, these Parisian gossipers), a race whose natures are as abnormal as the Holstein giants, so out of the range of the European model that we cannot judge them. We have no standard suitable to apply. As an example, of course, they gave Ivan the Terrible, who prayed at the feet of the statues of the saints one day — when he happened to be playing the ascetic — the next day, he kissed the white shoulders of his mistress. One day, he was the humble follower of the Christ, dreaming of a cloister beside the White Sea; the next, an intolerant despot. No other race has embraced such extremes of mind without disintegrating madness, and — begging the pardon of your Royal Highness — (You have commanded me to tell you the truth, to conceal nothing, knowing as you do that only they who can confront facts can succeed) have not all the Romanoffs been mad? Sometimes, they have possessed a peculiar genius, I grant you. But still have they not been mad? Only one has died a natural death. Here, a gay doll-lady interrupted excitedly, waving her painted fan: "And history will repeat itself! None of

them will die a natural death! Mark my words! There is something about them that attracts destruction."

Then another — they call her the Princess Conti (by courtesy! She is beautiful enough to be a princess by blood) — said: "Yes,— and there was Peter the Great! Do you desire a better example of genius and madness?"

Your Royal Highness, have you heard that it is whispered (outside Russia, of course!) that the Empress Catherine poisoned him because his caprices were becoming dangerous for her? (That is well to remember! There is a Catherine and a Peter to-day! I recall now what I said to you once of history repeating itself.) You cannot imagine how these petted Parisian dolls enjoy toying with your fabulous Russia. The contrast delights me.

The Duc de Broglie is considered somewhat of an authority on things Slav, as you know. He said at once: "Look at Elizabeth, his daughter! Her amours, her beauty, have been the talk of Europe." Some one quoted an old French diplomat who had seen her in her girlhood as saying that her beauty was so unusual that at first sight it struck terror to the soul. And then some one quoted a French letter of your mother's, who, as you know, is in Paris now. (I must tell you more about this letter later!) *"Enfin jamais figure ne ressembla à la sienne. Jamais si belles couleurs, ni gorge, ni mains, n'ont été vues."*

And what a life has been hers! She has known the pleasures of a woman, the adventures of a boy and the honors of an Empress. But she, too, has been mad like all the Romanoffs. She has known no bounds. Her debaucheries have grown with the years. It is because of them that she is dying, exhausted and prematurely old. She has tried to push further and further the limits of

pleasure. And these last few years (as your Royal Highness knows well), she has seldom seen the day. Night has been her day. Dinner has been served at four in the morning. Her Majesty retired to sleep at dawn. So much for the Duc de Broglie.

They continued by saying — these gay French people — that his Royal Highness, your husband, the Grand Duke Peter, has inherited the madness of his race, without its beauty, and its vivid vitality.

The quality that has made the Romanoffs successful is joy. They who had it succeeded. They who had it not failed. Peter the Great and Elizabeth were of the race of Venus. They loved life. They dared to live it. Your Royal Highness, too, is of the race of Venus, and the only one in Russia,— aye! — perhaps in the world to-day. How do I know, you would ask? Apropos of this word Venus, I have something to tell you. But that, too, must wait for another time.

As illustrative of this monstrous Russia of which all were talking, the Princess Conti mentioned the difficulty of accrediting ambassadors there, since it is imperative that they be young. In agreement, an Englishman recalled how a few years ago the ambassador from his country, Sir Guy Dickens, had asked for recall on the ground of age. He said the King of England must see to it that only strong men, in the flower of youth, be sent to Russia. No one else could attend the courts, masks, theaters. "I am not capable of doing it because of my years. In addition, I am tired of working against plots and intrigues." Nothing, of course, was said to me — although I have lived in Russia — since I am only an humble musician. People forget that music cultivates the brain as well as the senses.

If your Highness will permit me an independent opin-

ion — and a digression —, I have noticed in my wandering life that the great possess certain physical characteristics of the land in which they were born. The physical characteristics of Russia are monstrous and unusual. One can ride for months upon a single road. Think of the central plains whose extent is so great they make the mind dizzy; the lonely seas which winter dominates; the mountains whose peaks are the highest in Europe; the rivers whose breadth is that of seas. There are swamps in the north that stretch to the Polar ocean. There are plains in the south as great as seas. Burning winds from the deserts of Asia sweep across it and icy blasts from an Arctic wilderness. This different climate, Catherine Alexevna, has bred a different race, whose men and women of genius have been monsters.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

Mon cher Nicholas: You warn me against merriment, lest I forget! That is the tragedy of it. There is no opportunity to forget. If you were here, if you could see the life that is mine, the hours of loneliness (I am not permitted to write or to receive letters. Work of all kinds is forbidden. Reading would be, too, if they knew I cared for it), you would advise me to keep my mind sane by any means. When the Grand Duke is with me, I am lonelier than when he is away, or, worse still, bored. Dissipation is the only relief. If it were not for that, I could not go on with this life.

Perhaps, the Grand Duke might have been good for something somewhere else. He has been taken and placed in a position where he does not belong, for which he has neither ability nor ambition. In doing this they destroyed what good there was in him. He is like an oarless boat in the current of a river — sure of destruc-

tion. The poor fellow has not even a tongue to call his own. He cannot speak well any language. One would think he had no ideas. But sometimes these short, dark, winter days, when he walks up and down the room and plays upon his violin, I find that he can think in music. That is the way that struggling soul finds outlet. That is the only time when he has the power or the dominance of a man.

I remember once, some summers ago, we were at Oranienbaum on the Gulf of Finland. He had been particularly wild and unmanageable, so much so, indeed, that he won a reprimand from her Majesty. At night — it was midsummer and darkness comes only for an hour or two after midnight — he took his violin and went upon the terrace that overhangs the sea. There, he played for a time, improvised wonderfully. I learned to know him a little that night; his longing for the home of his childhood in Sweden, for the life of an artist musician. I found that he is as lonely and heart-sick of Russia as I. When he came in from the terrace with the joy and the softness of the music in his eyes, I tried to talk with him. I felt I understood. But he snapped at me just like a surly dog. No one can do anything with him with words. They wound his sensibilities. Sometimes I pity him. And sometimes I abhor him. Besides music, he loves gems and cards and Hungarian wine. He loves playing with dolls, his negro dwarf Narcissus, his dog Mopsinka. He loves his can of "Knaster," his German Bible, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* in French, and his mistress, Elizabeth Woronzov, who is almost as stupid as he.

Here in Russia they have taken away from me every employment of the life of a woman. And they expect me to develop normally. They were right, those clever

French people of whom you wrote. They make monsters in Russia. I live under the same roof with my son but I seldom see him — never alone. The Grand Duke, my husband, is a stranger who seldom speaks. Access to her Majesty is well nigh impossible. I have no relatives — no one. I am surrounded by spies. I am alone — save for Count Bestushev. How can I help but lose womanly charm in this development of wits to ensure the safety of my head? If I have any left now, it is you whom I have to thank, your warmer temperament, your youth, your southern charm.

How I would like to throw off this life and rush away to Paris where you are! But we would not stay in Paris! No, no, my Nicholas! We would leave for Spain, Egypt, Greece, where I could live as other women live — freely. There in your arms I could win back that womanhood which I feel to be dying within me. It is a strange thing to stand off and watch the death of a part of yourself and be unable to prevent it. That is what I am doing. I am being fitted for the life I am to lead. And if I win in the end — and there is nothing to do but win — I shall be a machine that wears the dress of a woman. In those days of empty power, when I sit perked up in state I shall play for love (which I shall never have!) more bitterly than I played for a crown. The world will look on with evil comments, not understanding that it is the last attempt of a lonely woman to find her heart and bring it back to life.

Ah! my Nicholas, when you come back we will be happy together for a while, just a little while (nothing lasts long here, not even happiness!) before that cold, desert splendor men call kingship begins.

C. A.

PARIS.

There is a new beauty in Paris! Is it not meet that I leave off serious subjects occasionally and chat with you of folly in a city where folly rules? What is her name, you ask? How does she look? Her name is the "Little Murphy" and she is a model of Boucher. He considers her the most beautiful woman he has painted. And she is an Irish peasant! The King is interested in her, too, and the Pompadour does not care. She loves power now better than love.

I had the privilege of seeing her in his studio the other day. Boucher, you know, great artist that he is, is the kindest of men. The "Little Murphy" is just such a blond beauty among women as Gregory Orlov is among men. She reminded me of him. Her hair is the color of ripe grain; not gold nor bronze but a commingling of the two. Her eyes seem brimming with tears and laughter. And she has that pink and white skin of island women where sea fogs are heavy. Boucher will make her famous. He posed her for us that we might understand his delight in her. First, with her hair unbound, against a drapery of blue velvet, beautifully dull, as if it had been bathed in tears —*"bleu malade des mauves"*— and edged with faded pink. Next, against a satin surfaced, mahogany wardrobe, her hair in a twisted eight upon her neck, that it might not cloud the outlines. Her body was reflected in a wonderful pink within the rich wood, and, strangely enough, as if it were a foot beneath the surface. This gave Boucher pleasure. Shades, tints, are more important to him than the war which the great Frederick is carrying on which is drawing Europe into the whirlpool. Frederick is a man of genius in a territory so small it makes him uncomfortable. He is determined to get out or make other nations suffer. It is the

opinion of everyone that his future and that of his country, depend upon what he can do with Russia — and you. When Russia enters with its armies, it will tip the balance. He might possibly hold his own against the rest of Europe — with the help of England — but Russia he knows is too much for him.

Elizabeth hates him. She would spend the last ruble to ruin him. But Elizabeth cannot live. The Grand Duke adores him. But he is unfit to reign. Then it depends upon you! You are Prussian. He is counting upon that. You are a woman and, therefore, to be intimidated. You remember the Russian proverb: "Women have long hair and short thoughts." If he cannot win you to his side so that his ambassadors rule Russia, he will destroy you. Distrust everything, everyone — except the Great Chancellor! Your interests and his are one. Frederick has been told of your friendship with General Aprakin. In case he enters the war against Prussia at the head of an army, he counts on bribing or in some way inducing you to influence General Aprakin, to stay the Russian arms, or to give victory to Prussia. Just this week the king sent a messenger to your mother here in Paris to find out how great is her influence over you, and to urge the breaking of your friendship with Count Bestushev. You must tell your mother to keep out of the game. She was not made for affairs. With her, politics descend to personalities. Her viewpoint is that of wife of a petty officer. She hates the Great Chancellor just as she did when she first went with you to Russia. That was fifteen years ago or more. When she started upon that journey, Frederick the Great gave her as motto of conduct —"*Bestushev-Rjumin must be destroyed.*" And Bestushev-Rjumin is still minister of Russia and foremost diplomat of the world. For fifteen

years every court of Europe has instructed its ambassadors to bring about his fall. With the Great Chancellor out of the way, Europe need no longer fear Russia. It would fall back toward the Orient, cease to be aggressive, and give up its dream of domination. Think what a man is he, your Royal Highness, whom the combined brains of Europe cannot outwit! Remember he holds Russia in the palm of his hand to give to you, just as Peter the Great gave it to him. Do not let anything make you lose sight of this! Your life depends upon it!

Your mother cannot see — as you can — that the man she hates represents a principle, that he incorporates a political ideal. To her he is just an enemy. Is she not foolish to combat a person whom Europe obeys? He is old and feeble; and if he is human, he is weary of struggle. But — he is the one to consider!

In regard to the quotation from your mother in my last letter about the Empress, it will be difficult for you to believe her guilty of such indiscretion. That extract is from a letter which she wrote M. de Pouilly. He is planning to make a history of Russia. She is helping him by writing down what she knows from her two years' residence there and her correspondence with you.

Now that I have arranged for you to write to your mother again (after the prohibition of her Majesty) you must be careful, as this proves. Any correspondence (except the letters to me, which go by a channel through which you send no others) may be intrusted to d'Olilio, first violinist to the Grand Duke. I vouch for his trustworthiness!

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

We have had a great ball, my Nicholas, to mark the high tide of the holidays. You can imagine what a great

ball means in Russia. It is the custom to change costume once or twice in the course of a night. When the ball was announced, I was in despair. I did not know what to wear. I have exhausted the art of the robe makers of Paris. There is nothing left that is new and expensive. What do you suppose I did? Coquetry of dress at our court can go no further. Everyone tries to outdo the other in elegance and novelty.

I wore a perfectly plain gown of white *gros de Tours*. You know how slender I am. There was no trimming upon it. My long hair was brushed smoothly back and done in a fox's tail. I put a white rose in my hair and another in my corsage, flung a gauze scarf about my shoulders, and put on a white gauze apron. When I entered, every eye was turned toward me. I was merry that night and my cheeks were red. I never danced so well! That was because I was happy and knew I pleased. I cannot remember having so many compliments as I had that night. They said I was beautiful as day. We like to dream of day here in these six-month Arctic midnights. But to tell you the truth, I have never considered myself beautiful. I please people. Therein lies my power. And they — the people — cannot distinguish.

I had a great time in getting my hair done as I wished. My old hairdresser protested against the simplicity. What do you suppose I did? You will never be able to believe it when I tell you. Or, if you do, you will understand how Russianized I am. I slapped him roundly — in the face! First with one hand and then with the other. I felt better afterward. Yet I was not angry in earnest. I was playing the part while my other self looked on. I am an actor in life instead of upon a stage. I am becoming Russianized, my Nicholas. Or, better, I am

wearing draped about me, when I wish, the Russian soul. One proof of it is the way I am piling up debts. Thousands upon thousands of rubles! I am drawing upon the Bank of England! Think of it! In very truth, Nicholas. No jest! There are days when the only thing that gives me pleasure is to spend money. I do not care a copeck for the things I buy. I just long to spend money, make gold flow, the way Ivan the Terrible made blood flow, to open the veins of nature where the yellow ruin lies. I love danger, then! This land of excess makes me want excess too. It is in the air.

About four o'clock in the morning I slipped away from the ball with Princess Dashkov and Gregory and Alexis Orlov. We put on sable cloaks, boots and hoods, right on over our bare shoulders. A sledge was waiting. We drove like mad through those ghostly hours that precede the day. First, upon the Neva. Along the shore were blocks of ice like the ruins of a dead world. Their edges winked back the stars. From holes cut in the river mist arose. Then, for the open country! We longed to hear the wolves howl — all of us. Buried in each other's arms, with the memory of that languorous dance music in our ears, and the sickenly sweet smell of a myriad of tropic flowers in our nostrils, we longed for something brutal, untamed. And we did drive — each conscious of the same desire — to where we could hear wolves howling across the monotonous magnificence of snow. And I loved it! I clenched my teeth and loved it, and the thin, pale wind that stung my face. I felt arise in me for the first time the power — and the desire — to destroy. When we drove back to Petersburg, did we go home? No, no — not we! What did we do? We drove to a Russian bath. We turned out the inmates. We took the building by storm. After the

bath was over, we plunged into the snow — into the stinging snow that softly covered us. And we loved it! Its cold shock was good and sense calming! We did not go home until night. We went on to Princess Dashkov's. There we reveled in Russian fashion. I did not go to bed for two days and a night. And when I did, I slept that sleep of exhaustion which has neither dreams nor remembrance. When I awoke, it was as if the dissipation had not been, time had pushed it so far away from me. That is why I am telling it to you, as I do everything, because understanding, you will not care. Nothing leaves an impression upon me save an unreal shadow of memory. After it is over, it is the same as if it had not been. Every yesterday slips away into nothingness. Sometimes, I think there is really nothing but to-day.

Gregory Orlov is a splendid example of physical perfection, a tawny, supple tiger, in this new jungle which is Eighteenth Century Russia. You need not grieve or be jealous! There is no cause. If you were here, I should prefer you. But you are away! Life goes on and I must live; not because I wish to, but because I have to. The cold of the north brings with it the need of things that heat the blood. What more can I say than this; that when you are away I dream of you, long for you, despite the attractions and the demands of the present.

Adieu.

C. A.

PARIS.

A Greek friend of mine has just reached Paris. He is not a Greek with a surname from Little Russia. He boasts a pure patronymic. He has been traveling in Russia and is homeward bound with the pleasant plan of stirring up a political party in Greece to drive the

Turks out of Europe. Greece and Russia have one religion. In addition, the shores of Greece are the natural southern boundary of Russia. He said it ought to be the dream of the next Empress — who, of course, will be your Royal Highness! — to seat herself upon the throne of Constantine.

He was delighted with the architecture of Russian cities, Moscow in particular. When he first saw doves flying over its Graeco-Oriental domes the thought came to him that there should be a Venus to complete the picture — a Venus of the North. Later, in Petersburg, one night of winter, when the people were amusing themselves upon the Neva with their ice mountains, he saw you. The scene impressed him. The people at their pastime were silent as you have told me was their habit. There was little talking and no laughing. And the night was so windless the torches stood motionless like little red tulips made of flame. Looking up from their dazzle the sky was black, as if it were dotted with silver nails. The earth beneath its robe of snow was opaquely white. The ice mountains glowed darkly green in the shadow and glittered with a nameless brightness where the torches streaked them. Suddenly, a thrill of nervous response shocked the crowd into attention. Your Royal Highness and some of the courtiers had come. You went to the top of the nearest mountain. Gregory Orlov was with you. You passed so near my friend he saw your eyes. You were cloaked in white fur. White fur, whereon diamond dotted stars sparkled, was on your head.

The silence and mystery of the Arctic midnight wrapped you about with awe and imposed upon you a somber majesty. As Gregory Orlov reached his hand to conduct you to the sledge for the descent, the north-

ern lights flamed up the sky, unfolding a transparent, cold, swaying fan of phosphorescent green, deepening toward the center. As its unreal light touched you it glorified you, and he exclaimed: "The Venus of the North! A Venus born of the ice and snow, with its blue-green fury in her eyes and about her person, something primeval, splendid, that recalls the coldly opalescent waters that stretch from the White Sea to the Pole! The cold, the silence, of the nights of winter, the brief dazzle of day — all are there, and, besides, something intangible, unconquerable, dominant."

Leaving Petersburg, he traveled over northern Russia before returning to Paris by way of Vienna. On this journey he was impressed by the granite strewn across the land with no apparent reason. It is a country of swamps with few rocks. It looked like the ruins of a world. It impressed him unpleasantly. And Petersburg, the city of frail wood — a Finnish village — after the marble castles of Europe, made him feel that nothing was substantial there — nothing real — that it was improvised for the moment. This seems to have affected its inhabitants. They live there like people camping out — riotously, madly — as if at night it might end and be over, as if nothing mattered for more than a moment. He said he did not dream that any race was capable of such dissipation. That is the way it is in new lands where there is no past and all is future.

He saw Count Bestushev-Rjumin, too, that night. He looked feeble and frail. He had eyes for no one but your Royal Highness. Under the ghastly green glow of the borealis the concentrated power of his wrinkled old face was frightful. It was that of an enchanter.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

Is it not strange, my Nicholas, that a person who cannot grasp the reality of pleasure, can feel pity? All this is apropos of the Grand Duke, who the past few days has been obsessed by a vision. It may, of course, be the result of drink. He is drinking heavily, and of those fiery wines of Hungary. Think of their red fury in that pale body of his!

Whenever he walks upon the street — he told this to one of the men of the court, not to me — suddenly a muffled figure slips from a building's shadow and walks beside him. One day a friend was with him, and he kept saying to the friend: "Step over a little! Make room for him!" The friend turned to look! There was no one to be seen, nothing but the creaking snow. He thought he was mad. Well he might! Then he learned not to say anything, but kept walking closer and closer to his companion, as if to make room for an invisible third.

From these excursions he comes in white, with frightened, pitiful eyes. One day he plucked up sufficient courage to look at the phantom. It was Peter the Great! But so changed — pale, sad. When he left the Grand Duke that day, he turned and spoke to him saying: *"Poor Peter! Poor Peter!"* Since his own name is Peter, he takes it as a premonition of death. Now he dislikes to leave the palace, he is so afraid the phantom will walk beside him. Even the phantom of the mighty Peter is more powerful than the living presence of his feeble grandson.

Now the Grand Duke is trying to forget the vision at his old pastime, playing with dolls. He has had a multitude of leaden soldier dolls sent by some ambassador's wife. He has had them dressed in Prussian military costume and he busies himself playing with them. They

cover the floor of one room. He trains and manoeuvers them as if they were alive. None of the discipline is neglected. Sometimes, he is not seen for days when he is particularly busy drilling his soldiers. He has always had the greatest penchant for dolls.

The other day I heard the sound of a commotion coming from his room. What do you suppose it was? A dog was barking. The Grand Duke was cursing. I could hear the hiss of a whip. He had a live rat suspended from the ceiling by its tail! He explained that the rat had committed treason. His terrier was leaping and barking and the Grand Duke was lashing the rat to death with a jewelled knout, his face distorted with emotion until it did not resemble anything human. He cut the helpless rat into pieces stroke by stroke.

He is so unlike other people that he cannot get on with them. They hurt him. Therefore, he takes to their visible images — dolls. He has a passion for gems, too. I do not know that there is anything else that he loves so well, except his violin, or that gives him so much pleasure. He plays with them, unset, for hours. They satisfy some longing of his nature. It is as if he wished to draw near to life, to warm his heart. But he does not know how. He is too timid. People hurt him. In gems he feels the stored up passion of life, the reverberating reflection of things he desires, and he loves them accordingly. They have no tongues, no mocking laughter. They cannot wound him. It is pitiful to see him sit and fondle them, with an unutterable look within his eyes. It is as if they were prisoned souls which he divines — like his own. He is not an imbecile, although the world says he is. He might have been an artist musician. I alone divine this power in him. I perhaps understand him better than any one else. And yet it is I whom he

hates! He makes no concealment of his intention to set me aside the instant her majesty dies for Elizabeth Woronzov. He says he will do with me what Peter I did with his wife — confine me in a convent. He offers me every insult. And yet I pity him! To understand is always to pity. C. A.

PARIS.

How I wish you could be here freed from restraint of your exalted position, wearing that boy's suit that became you so well on the nights we made merry at the house of Leo Narishkin!

Where would we go first? To the shops, of course! Are you not a woman? To Magimal, the jeweller, at the sign of the Golden Vase in the Rue Dauphin, or to Petit Dunkerque on the Quai Conti. They, as you know, are the best in Paris. Then, making believe we were servants in pay of your Russian Highness, we would visit Bourbon in the Rue des Vieux Augustins where shoes are made for great ladies of France; and to Bertin, designer of robes, and Legros, the hair dresser. And then, perhaps, to see the cosmetics of Madame Martin who can give youth to age. But why tell you this when Petersburg is more French than Paris! Besides, it sets the fashions, too. It is the most luxuriously gowned city in the world.

It is amazing how Petersburg changes nationality. Under Anna Ivanovna it was a German city where German was spoken. Now it is a French city. The Russian has a faculty for taking on the character of other races. He has mental suppleness. That is why he is such a charming companion. He can be anything at will. The upper classes have no racial characteristics. At least, they impress me that way! Their knowledge, their

manners, even their vices are borrowed. They are brilliant, spoiled children. But they are charming!

If you reproduce French fashions in Petersburg, you cannot reproduce French art — no, nor imitate it. This is apropos of Greuze whom I visited the other day. I knew him when I was in Paris before. He said he was eager to paint you. I told him the time had gone by for that — for his art. He should have painted you when you first went to Russia, fifteen years ago, when you were a yellow haired jonquil-maiden, with the pink freshness of spring in your cheeks. Now you are better suited for the art of Boucher — its sumptuous soullessness. That is what Russia has done.

Art is a wonderful thing, Catherine Alexevna. They who love it can put up better with loss of everything else. Perhaps art was made so that when we are weary of life we can keep its beautiful moments. Speaking of beauty recalls to me Gregory Orlov. And that reminds me that it was reported in the dispatches of the French ambassador that Gregory Orlov is enamored of your Russian Highness. I knew it would come sooner or later! It could not help it! Like draws like. And that reminds me, too, of something else. Prince Poniatovsky was chosen to go to Russia with the English ambassador, because of his social graces, with the hope that he might make an impression upon you and thus be helpful to England. I know, of course, that you are fond of him. But you are fonder still of Russia. This suggestion will be all that will be necessary. Poniatovsky is handsome, too. But cultivation has made him effeminate. Although he is of noble birth, you will not like him as I fear that you will Gregory Orlov, who has neither wealth, position, nor nobility of blood to boast of. But in giving him nothing nature gave him all.

A witty Frenchman said something the other day which I must repeat to you. He said the sharpness of Frederick the Great's tongue was more responsible for his troubles than the sharpness of his sword. When Voltaire's *History of Peter the Great* was shown to him he exclaimed, "Why should any one wish to write a history of Siberian wolves and bears!" He has said sharper things than that about the morals of her Majesty. They have been repeated to her. That is why she is determined to destroy him. If he would bridle his tongue, other people would sheathe their swords.

I am convinced from a thousand things individually too insignificant to repeat that the position of your Highness is most dangerous. Do not neglect anything that can make for safety! Life can be lost but once.

Your mother is saying unwise and doing foolish things just as usual, and, incidentally, piling up thousands of rubles of debts since the Empress cut off her allowance from the crown.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

My dear Nicholas: Yesterday, fate kindly permitting in the absence from the city of the Grand Duke, and the occupation of the vice-chancellor with her Majesty, Count Bestushev spent two hours of the dark winter day with me. This old man is almost a mother to me. In one way he is in truth. It is he who has trained me. He took me in hand when I was fifteen. And he has the strangest influence over me! I wish I could explain. I do not know how. I have tried and tried.

If it were possible to love with the spirit, with the soul, leaving the body, its desires, its caresses, out of the question, I should say that I loved him. But how could that

be, so strange, so unnatural! It is nature's impossibility. And I feel — I think — that he loves me in that same inexplicable way. And there is not a page of my life that is hidden from him. It would be useless if I wished to try to conceal anything from that penetrating intelligence. And he is old! He belongs to the age of Peter the Great!

Can it be that he loves me for my mind, my soul, and reckons of no consequence the sins of the body? Could a man be great enough for that? I have told you of my growing difficulty in grasping the physical certainty of facts; how realities are slipping from me. His presence counteracts this. Or, better, it gives the substitute of mental stability. The instant he enters a room I am more dominant, fearless, than nature made me. I feel that there are no impossibilities for me. And he, he grows perceptibly younger. He enters into the youth of me. My Nicholas, I have really seen this marvelous man throw off age like a garment and become young. And I have seen him grow shriveled and old as at the waving of a magician's wand, until it seemed that he might have been born at the time of the building of the Pyramids. When he is with me I lose this pitiful feeling for suffering and weakness which is characteristic of me. I see with his eyes. I feel as he feels. I love, then, the pomp of armies. I love the picturesqueness of cruelty and the splendor of blood. And yet I know that it is not really I who love any of these things. It is another influence thrown over my clear and personless mind, where unknown souls rise and set like mysterious moons.

I wish you could have been there to have heard him talk, you who are interested in different phases of life! He says — Count Bestushev — that this is the last great

age of the world; great in the sense of the past. They who come after us will not see life like this. They will not dare to live. Personality will be a crime. They will be fettered by conventions. But now is the day of the individual! Never has its sway been so far reaching. Religions have lost their primitive power. Kings and emperors are no longer divine. But after us — here he became emphatic in his earnestness and his deep set eyes glowed sternly — after us, all sorts of mental fads and culture schemes, and theories for soul-development will rush in and cover up personality. In accordance with these theories each one will try to force himself into a ridiculous ideal of commonplace perfection. The natures of men will lose range. Everyone will be commonplace. But now! — what grace! France has made folly an art! What love! What hate! In short, what a range of life! In the after time people will be as much alike as if they had been cut out with the same cake cutter. Never again will there be such daring, such fancy, such repartee! We use our tongues to keep our heads on. They must be nimble and fine.

"I wish you to remember, Catherine Alexevna (if I should die and not have the chance to tell you again), that this is a choice period of time, and that after us will come a spirit of commercialism that will make life dull, and people commonplace.

"Louis XV has said it, '*Après nous le déluge.*' And this is what he meant. Now we would laugh in the face of a king if he were stupid, even if his blood were the bluest Bourbon. But then — then — in this after time they will pet a pig if he have a penny. The time that comes after us will be like a play I read when I was in England, in the service of good King George, a play by an English playwright called Shakespeare. The name

of it is *Midsummer Night's Dream.* It tells how a woman, whose eyes were blinded by love, lost her heart to a donkey. Yes, your Royal Highness! — he exclaimed to me — that is true! The world that comes after us will have its true, normal eyes blinded by fads and theories of reform, until it falls down and worships the donkey of commonplaceness." (There is no translation of this play into our language. I am answering your question in advance, you see.)

Whenever he leaves me, Nicholas, after a conversation like this, it is as if I walk on air. I am triumphant, dominant, joyous! That unconquered soul of him entered into me. It must be that he loves me. How can it be otherwise when in return for all he gives, he asks nothing? Could such a thing be, think you, Nicholas, that people could love each other with their brains, a man and a woman? Did he caress me with his mind as he sat there those dark winter hours, and I did not know it? His devotion is unshakable. For me he does things that jeopardize the fulfillment of his ambition.

And yet, is it good? Is it good? Is it he who is making the monster out of me whom Europe gossips of and condemns, but does not understand? Has he separated, so I can not reunite them, the heart and the head? Has he made me two separate women, one of whom nothing can take away from him — nothing, nothing; his so thoroughly he can laugh at my lovers in scorn? Sometimes for days, Nicholas, after he leaves me I live on in this mad frenzy of the brain. I dominate everything with which I come in contact. And then — then — I find that I am weary, a peculiar weariness that is not exactly physical. Then I desire another kind of life. But when I get it, I cannot enjoy it. There is his revenge. I cannot make it real. That is why I need you so,

Nicholas, long for you, you who in face and soul belong to the race who have seen life clearest. There are days when I try to keep your face before me in my mind. Its passionate warmth in this misty north warms me as a fire warms the body when one is chilly. I long to hear again your joyous laughter! Surely, it will not be long now before you return to Russia and to me!

C. A.

PARIS.

I have played for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbé Bernis, a number of times lately. And for him alone! He is one of the first courtiers, with the stamp of the *ancien régime*. He is fond of music and more capable of judging it than most men of affairs. He is really *un peu connaisseur*.

The last time I was there he talked with me after the playing was over and we spent an hour together happily enough. We talked of Russia because it is a subject of which every one talks. His ideas are original. He says that Russia became civilized so quickly that she is suffering from vertigo. She has done in a few years what it took Europe centuries to do — since the Dark Ages, in fact. This quick change from barbarism to civilization has destroyed the normal. As a result, in Russia to-day, we see excess — a debauch of immensity. Nothing is done in moderation. Its royal palace — the one which is just being finished — is the largest in Europe. Its furnishings are the most costly. They put Versailles to shame. Its drawing rooms are twice the height and length of Parisian drawing rooms. Its banquets are the most sumptuous; its gems the largest and most numerous. Nowhere has man lived in such reasonless magnificence. Nowhere can be found such astonishing volup-

tuaries. Nowhere have they been so prodigal of gold. Nowhere has man so disregarded law.

Then he gave expression to his pet theory — which is justified by fact — that the great Russians of this century (those of pure Russian blood), live but a little while.

Peter the Great was only fifty-three when he died. But he was an old man, wornout and exhausted. He did not permit himself but three hours' sleep a night. The Empress Elizabeth is in the forties. A young woman as years count! Yet she is dying of premature old age. Count Alexis Razumovsky, her morganatic husband, that exquisite rococo Russian courtier, with his faded, pastel graces (of whom returning travelers tell), cannot be far in the fifties. But he is as feeble as if he carried a century upon his shoulders. He is swaddled in furs — in the summer time. Yet he shivers, he is so old. Count Bestushev is still active despite his years, I grant. That is because of his English blood, a calmer — shall I say duller? — stock.

But look at General Aprakin! He impresses one as utterly burnt out. He is white and waxen. He has not strength to laugh or talk. That is the way they are in Russia to-day, if they happen to live past forty — premature old age or death.

The reason he gives is interesting. Your Royal Highness will appreciate it. He says, for example, whenever you cut down the primeval forests of the north, at once there spring up to take their places, fields of flaming flowers — in some places called fire-flowers. They grow to unusual height. They bloom richly. They are of brilliant magenta color. They possess charm. They possess beauty. But they do not last! They have soft stalks. They lack strength — resistance. They wilt.

They wither. That is what the Russian of to-day is — an exotic of life. The atmosphere is exhausting. Neither brain nor body can withstand it. That is why life is poured out like driven rain. But they are beautiful and brilliant while they last — these fine flowers of your Russian race. We like them! They appeal to our artistic sense.

Then, he spoke of you, your different race, and a quality which he termed sphinxlike that has puzzled the diplomats. None of them knows where to place you. That is well! Keep them in the dark until you step to the front and fight for your rights. My impression is that he does not like you. You are an unknown quantity which he fears. I hear he is making efforts for the French ambassador to lend you money instead of England. You see he hopes to influence you through your debts.

In every salon of Paris your name is coupled with that of Orlov. Whenever I hear it, it is as if a dagger entered my heart. Yet I knew from the first it must be! It has grieved me inexpressibly to be away from you, because I felt this must happen. But perhaps along with happy memories of the past, you will preserve a sort of gratitude to me because I have tried to serve you. You will estimate the folly in the heart of a man when I tell you that despite the new star that has arisen upon the horizon of Russia, I am counting the days that must pass before I can set out for Petersburg. There are days when I think only of the past and the present has no value.

One of the things that attracts you in Orlov, besides his beauty, is one of the things that attracts you in the race — that mysterious Russian soul, which you understand better than anyone else in the world. But I do not be-

lieve — pardon me this, your Highness! — let its sincerity be its excuse for being and my proven devotion to yourself — that he can love and understand you, the woman, as I do. I will tell you why when I reach Russia. I will prove it to your Highness!

No matter how Fate may heap honors, there is love — simple, human love the heart must have. To be able to love is proof of genius. The heart has title to nobility. Herein lies my hope that you cannot forget me while I am away from you, dreaming, as I do daily, of the first gay moment of joy when we shall be alone together.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

Dear Nicholas Murievich: Although I have not acknowledged it, I am mindful of your *memento*.

Things grow perceptibly worse as regards my position, more dangerous, and less easy to maintain without giving hint that I am aware of danger. My servants, my friends, except Princess Dashkov and Count Bestushev, are being exiled. Count Bestushev owes his permanency — as indeed he has always — to the fact that amid her caprices and hysteria, her Majesty knows that he is good for Russia. But she has never liked him! And just now I am in great disfavor. The only thing that can help me materially is a personal interview with her Majesty, who, at heart, has always liked me. You know how difficult it is to see her alone at any time, and more especially now since her illness.

I must tell you what happened last night. Leo Narishkin has taken up the habit of pausing before my door and meowing like a cat. When I meow back, he comes in.

Last night between six and seven he meowed. I let him in. He brought a greeting from the wife of his

elder brother, said that she was ill and added, "You ought to pay her a visit."

"But how can I? I may not go out without permission."

"I will take you there if you wish."

"You are crazy! You would be thrown into a dungeon and I would suffer all the unpleasantnesses in the world."

"No one shall know a thing about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I will be back in an hour after you. The Grand Duke will be at supper."

For some time I have remained in my room at this hour under pretext that I did not care to eat. The Grand Duke sits at table until midnight, gets drunk and falls asleep. (Since the birth of Paul Petrovich we have not slept in the same room.)

Leo Narishkin departed. I called my old Calmuck. I told him to bring me a suit of men's clothes. This Calmuck of mine never opens his mouth. It is harder to make him talk than to make other people keep silence. At the appointed hour Leo Narishkin was back and meowed at my door. I let him in. Through the little entrance salon we reached the exit and were not seen by any one. There we got into a carriage. We surprised Anna Nikitishna who had not expected us. Gregory and Alexis Orlov were there and Princess Dashkov. She, too, in men's clothes. She looked just like a sixteen-year-old boy. She is not much older.

We had the gayest evening! When it was time to go, Gregory Orlov sent for his sledge. We got into it and drove to the Dresden Woman's, who, as you know, keeps a gambling resort for men of the upper class and women of the theater. All the Orlov brothers were there to

protect me in case anyone should penetrate my disguise. They looked like an army of Holstein giants. Alexis Orlov, who is the strongest and the tallest man in Russia, stood beside me. It was at this same Dresden Woman's where he got that gash across the cheek and took the name every one gives him — *le balafré.*

We played *biribis* with a crowd of young bloods. Gregory and I won thousands of rubles. I had the touch of Midas. Everything turned to gold. That put Gregory in great spirits. He always needs money.

I heard myself and the Grand Duke discussed. All are on my side because of my devotion to the Orthodox Church. What else do you suppose I heard? That they like me because my sins are Russian! I laughed and said to Gregory, "By their sins ye shall know them — the Russians."

There was a dancing girl there from Little Russia called Maschuta, who was so wildly beautiful I could not take my eyes from her face. I hear a good deal of talk of her. I saw Gregory Orlov look at her again and again. She is very small — not larger than a child — and round and muscular. But so exquisite are her proportions one does not realize she is below normal in size. She does not wear stays but her body is as perfectly formed as if she did. Her eyes are pale — gray I think — but they blacken and dilate and sometimes turn green like a cat's. Her skin is so dark it reminds one of the negro races; but it is underflushed with red. The remarkable thing about her, however, is her teeth. They are more brilliantly white than any I ever saw. They are a perpetual lure. And the light runs across them in a hard, cruel way. She moves as if she were shod with velvet. The tones of her voice are soft and strange like her movements. Never could one forget her teeth or

the vigorous litheness of her body. For an instant I hated her. I would rather be an irresistible woman, Nicholas Murievich, than Empress! She is like an exotic fruit, but not the pale kind we grow here under glass.

She sang to her own accompaniment on the balalaika, one of the songs of the Cossacks, full of plaintive minors that floated indistinctly as smoke. Then, she danced a dance of Little Russia, a dance of quick pauses that almost stop the breath, and crisp, startling movement. When she finished, I saw a look in Gregory Orlov's face that I never saw there before. She stared at me so intently it was as if she suspected something. These gipsies have the divining power of animals, some sensitiveness that we who live in houses have lost.

There was danger, too, that night at the Dresden Woman's! The spies of all nations were there.

From the Dresden Woman's we went on to Gregory Orlov's rooms. He wished to find out how I am progressing with my fencing. I showed him! I have learned the *coup de Jesuit*. Once I twisted the sword from his hand. There is some glory in that! Gregory is no mean swordsman.

I reached the palace in time for breakfast. My old Calmuck was waiting for me, and the Grand Duke was so drunk he could not get up. So everything turned out well. Or, as Count Bestushev says — he learned this in England,—" All's well that ends well." That is better, is it not? We can safely have these parties twice a week now, since everything is at sixes and sevens because of her Majesty.

I hope you will be here soon to be with us.

C. A.

PARIS.

A new fear has taken possession of me. I feel that you do not appreciate the nearness of the danger that threatens, that you do not realize life is at stake; that if you do not win, there is death or prison or the convent ahead. Do not devote too much time to amusements. Do not let them make you forget the noose is drawing closer. Do not let easy pleasures of the moment lead you into carelessness.

I know it is your belief — practice — to make life always the same, to turn toward it the bright face of happiness, to live it up gayly to the last moment, without worry or fret for the things we cannot change. That is brave. But this is time when you must be two women. While living as usual so that no one can see a change in your conduct, you must be on the alert, making each day some helpful addition to the plans that will give you victory. You have against you in the Prussian ruler — unless you yield to his demands — one of the most unscrupulous of men. My heart fears for you and trembles, because so many long miles separate me from you whom I would gladly shield with my life.

Love can make us do wonderful things, Catherine Alexevna, things that surprise ourselves. I am glad now that Orlov is with you, because for the furtherance of his own selfish ends he will shield you.

Your letters, which are filled with accounts of merry-making and the diversions of court, make me fear lest you are forgetting, and need me near to keep whispering *memento!* Not every one has an opportunity to try for a crown — and that opportunity but once.

N. M.

PETERSBURG.

One day, or rather evening, last week, I held court for her Majesty. This does not mean that I am reinstated to favor. Not by any means! But merely that court had to be held since life and its duties go on, and legally the responsibility fell on me.

That day I spent the last hour or two of the limited light out-of-doors, driving. I felt need of space, quiet. I am learning to love the winters in Russia, Nicholas Murievich, and to enjoy the cold. It gives me a sense of well-being. It makes me feel that the strength of my body is inexhaustible. I crave physical exertions that are wearying. I have a desire to put my mind to sleep and let my body live on like a Titan. It is exhilarating, this sense of physical power. I must make the most of it. Winter is now slipping toward the verge of spring.

When it is at its height and the cold intensifies day by day, the light grows brighter, thinner, sharper, harder, more diamond-like, until midday is the color of steel. Above, in the air, as far as one can see, there are moving substances like frost, glittering points of ice — *spiculae* — that weave and weave. Winter is a splendid tragedy that bears death upon its wings. And the silence of these winters, Nicholas Murievich, is appalling. I love that, too! It makes me feel that I am the only one alive. The silence is so great it makes sound unthinkable. Even the wind is still. It is afraid of its own voice. It is so silent, Nicholas Murievich, it is as if sound perished ages ago. The cold is like silver. But the snow does not even shine. It grows whiter, whiter, more dead, more opaque. It is like the dream of an Arctic dawn before color was. I feel so very far away here, Nicholas Murievich, far from European life and civilization; so far it does not seem that a crime would be a crime as it

would be in other places. When the cold is great, one cannot feel a wound. One cannot feel blood flow. The fury of the north dulls the sensibility of pain. Sometimes, it makes one desire it to satisfy some unnatural longing of the soul. The winter makes me feel that I am living upon an uninhabited earth. If I do not get rid of this sensation, I shall do some dreadful thing some day, Nicholas Murievich, and never know it, because I shall be so far away from it.

As you know, there is nothing interesting in the country adjacent to Petersburg except monotony. That is so great under the snow that it is magnificent. Petersburg, that day while the light lasted, was a mass of smoky violet, heightened by the gold tower points of the Admiralty and the gold lace crosses of the church of Our Lady of Kasan. When I glimpsed it first coming back, after the day had dropped, it was an ugly blot upon the snow. But when I entered it under the faint moon when the streets were deserted and the night had come, it was a fairy city of faded silver, of free, fine, splendid lines, and silent streets.

I enjoyed the court that day because of something you said to me once; that a court scene in Russia was like a comic opera in Paris. I thought of it just that way that day, a comic opera in a Louis XV setting. I played my part, too, as if I were upon the stage in Paris, and you were looking on applauding. If it had been real, I could not have done it so well. But it was not! So I had the best time in the world trying to make it so.

Everyone came, even old Count Alexis Razumovsky, the life-long lover of her Majesty. His eyes are like sad, dull, black satin that is worn and old. And they never smile. But he has faded remnants of beauty of a languid, tropic kind. Subanski, the Adonis of the Hus-

sars, was a golden beauty, and at the same time a walking fashion-plate. He carried an enormous muff of sable and wore massive gems in his ears. He is a relative of Prince Carl Radziwill, *"Panni Kochanku,"* and he is interested that every one should know it. Count Bestushev was there dressed in black without a jewel or a decoration. He hovered silently in one corner like a black and ominous raven. He is so thin, he is like a spirit draped in flesh. But you can feel his presence! He does not need to speak, this old man whom Europe obeys. Count Esterhazy was present with a sneer upon his lips, and Marquis de l'Hôpital with his soft, insinuating gallantries. I hate them both! Leo Narishkin was smiles and merriment. I know he longed to whisper in my ear and ask when we could have another little party.

There were beauties from southern Russia whom you would have enjoyed, pale and sweet looking. They have not smelled fresh air for months. Imagine! They wore the latest gauzes from Paris and their French was perfect. But in their eyes the Occident and the Orient met.

There was a Finnish woman who gave me pleasure. She had faded blue-enamel eyes and corn-silk hair. Elizabeth Woronzov looked fatter and shorter and darker than usual, and more stupid, too. Countess Bruce was with her. Her cheeks were very red and her bright eyes were dancing with malice.

There were little round, fat-bellied, full-bearded merchants from Great Novgorod with thick golden rings dangling from their ears. (The Empress is mother of the people. On court days all can come.)

There were men from Kishinev in coarse, white woolen caftans; grumbling Finlanders; a Khan in saffron yellow; Lithuanian religionists; white faced people from the Bal-

tic provinces; great farmers from villages by the Volga; broad, felt hatted Moldavians; melancholy Poles wearing the *zupan;* Hungarians in short, braided coats; brown and wiry Tartars; Cossacks from the Don and the province of Orenburg, with their rich beauty in which there is almost a reminiscence of Greece; yellow-faced, slant-eyed Calmucks; turbanned Mussulmans; Turkish Janizzaries; soft-eyed Syrians; soldiers in corn-flower blue mantles; Circassians, Siberians; black robed Jesuits; sober coated Englishmen; in short, two hemispheres were represented.

There were dandies with the corrupt exquisiteness of the *ancien régime;* our old *noblesse,* showing the blending of the Russian and the Asiatic, wearing upon their breasts all the orders of Russia, noticeable among which were the Order of Saint Andrew upon a ribbon of blue, and the circular, diamond star of Alexander Nevsky. There were a few women of old Russia, genuine Muscovites, who can remember the *terem* which the great Peter abolished. *Modernité* has not affected them. They have the monumental calm of marble. I never saw the Grand Duke look uglier — or more pitiful. He wore a three-pointed Prussian hat with a Spanish feather stuck in the side of it; *bottes fortes;* and trousers as tight as his skin, so his poor little legs looked thinner than ever. He seemed more flat chested and insignificant in size than usual. His smallpox scars were prominent. That old twitching of the facial muscles, which he inherited from Peter the Great, made him look one moment as if he were giggling inanely, and the next as if he were ready to cry. His little round gray, foolish eyes were dashed with fretful tears. He did not have any memory nor any presence of mind, but just teetered aimlessly about on those twisting legs. I could have cried for sheer pity. And he is the descendant of Charles XII

of Sweden and Peter the Great of Russia, two of the world's most daring imperial generals. What a jest! What a pitiful jest!

There were plenty of suave and insinuating courtiers. There were statesmen whom all the courts of Europe had trained, and gray, battle-scarred warriors who learned their trade in the school of Aprakin and Marshal Münnich. We need not be ashamed of our statesmen at our entry among the nations.

Our young bloods are carrying dress to extremes just now. The expenditure of the court set is fabulous. The young men paint their faces, load themselves with gems like women, and keep their hands protected by muffs. They remind one of the courtiers of decadent Rome whom luxury had weakened. Many parallels indeed might be drawn between this Russia of ours and Rome of the decadence. It was Count Bestushev who said this after the court was over. The comparison pleases him. He toys with it frequently. There is the same disconcerting combination of the important and the unimportant; the same unreckoning luxury; the same breaking of customary barriers; and the same trembling presentiment of change to come. He likes it. He enjoys the shadows that are flitting over the age. He is glad he has lived to see them. He wishes he could see the end.

He said, as he stood in his corner watching the crowd, he amused himself by comparing me with the rulers of Russia. They of the past were superstitious and fanatical, while I am serene, pleasure loving, pagan. I am what he has made me. There was pride in his voice as he said this.

After the crowd had gone we were alone together for a while in the spacious room where a myriad of dying candles were fretting the floor with shadows.

"It will not be long, Catherine Alexevna, before you and I will be alone in Russia — just as we are in this room to-night — and a myriad of faiths "— here he waved his frail hands toward the fluttering candles — "will try to fetter us with the fading superstitions of the Muscovite. Ah! — Catherine Alexevna —"

He did not finish the sentence, but stood beside me in silence. For those moments of silence, Nicholas Murievich, I felt the greatest sensation I have felt in my life. It was as if something bound the soul of me to the soul of him. Of what use are words? I cannot explain! Good night, dear Nicholas Murievich.

C. A.

PARIS.

I am leaving Paris in the morning for the seat of war. Half the young noblemen of France are in the train of the armies, watching the game of death, just as one would watch a stage play at *Les Italiens*. I hear that the army of Russia is marching westward under Aprakin, an army so tremendous the earth trembles. The report here is that one hundred and ten thousand regulars and seventy thousand Cossacks are on the borders of Livonia marching toward Prussia, and that Orlov is with them commanding the artillery. No one talks of anything but the war and the advance of Russia. Gossip is laid aside. We all felt that it must come with the spring — the army of Russia. I go at once to the seat of war. My next letter will be from there.

I am worried that Orlov is no longer in Petersburg to watch over you. There is no one now but Count Bestushev. He is so overwhelmed, of course, with the added demands the war puts upon him and the enemies who are

trying to depose him, that there will be little time left for you.

My hope and consolation now must rest with you and your own ability. I know, of course, that you are more daring than other women, that the weariness of the decadent centuries has not touched you, and that you will always find courage in your heart.

N. M.

CHAPTER IV

NICHOLAS MURIEVICH, GREEK MUSICIAN AND PATRIOT, AND CATHERINE ALEXEVNA, GRAND DUCHESS OF RUSSIA — MORE LETTERS

ORANIENBAUM ON THE GULF OF FINLAND.

Dear Nicholas Murievich:

The coming of spring in these Arctic regions is nothing short of magic. It is as if an enchanter waved his wand one day and said, "Let there be winter!" The next day he waved it again and said, "Let there be spring!" And it is of the most exquisite and fragile fairness.

I am at Oranienbaum. I came down last week driving along the sandy road that borders the river. Spring was in its glory. The air was warm and sweet. The birches, the lindens, the dwarf willows, the mountain ash were covered with transparent green flames. It will not be long now before the syringa will be in flower.

The pale nights are filled with the voices of wild ducks that are coming back to visit the swamps and the marshes of the Gulf of Finland. And by day, too, their high, black shadows streak the sky. I am glad to be away from the court and its intrigues. Glad to rest! Yet, soon I shall need its excitement again. Its atmosphere has been my life too long to be dispensed with permanently. But I am happy away from it now. I am glad I am here.

I had an interview with her Majesty before I left for Oranienbaum. Before it took place she sent both Count Ivan Shuvalov and Vice-Chancellor Woronzov to dissuade me from my desire to return to Prussia. I persisted in the determination. Then, she sent for me to come to her apartments. This, of course, was what I wanted. I found her Majesty alone. The silk umbrella was not spread behind the French couch, so I knew that we were really alone. I began by thanking her Majesty for her graciousness in granting an interview and said that the mere announcement had made me live again. She replied, " Now you must tell me the truth ! "

I assured her that from me she would hear nothing but truth. Thereupon she demanded how many letters I had written to Field-Marshal Aprakin. I told her. She believed me and the question was settled. And yet that was not really what settled it. It was the understanding of each other of two women whom Fate has assigned the same places to fill. It was the inexplicable sympathy of like to like.

She was grown noticeably thinner. In her eyes there is a light which only approaching death can light. One of her wishes is to live long enough to destroy the Prussian king. Tenacity of purpose makes her great. She is not a woman to be measured by the petty German standard. I took leave of her with tears.

This interview insures a certain amount of peace — for the present. Yet, here in the quiet of Oranienbaum, by this pale and placid Gulf, which is scarcely marked by the tides — which do not rise and fall as they do in the German Ocean — I am losing faster than ever, Nicholas Murievich, the sense of reality. I cannot get the mental certainty of a thing when I have the physical certainty of it. Nor indeed do I think I grasp any cer-

tainty. Perhaps this is what happens to people who are led to a place in life where they do terrible things. If I could get away now, I could recover, because I see what is happening. But if I cannot get away — and I know that I cannot — the day will come when I cannot see. The day will come when I shall do terrible things, Nicholas Murievich, when the destruction which is going on within me shall be complete.

The day of the Court when I was driving outside Petersburg where the snow wastes are, I thought how like them is the soul of me, bleak and brilliantly reflecting. Within me are the same wastes of cold and silence. As I drove along that day, I saw miniature whirlwinds of frost dust rise up and dance across the levels. Or, I saw dark, soft-footed, furry creatures with furtive eyes dart over it. It showed both brilliantly. But the waste itself was motionless and felt nothing. It was a mirror that gave back the motion of life. I am becoming like it, Nicholas Murievich. No one escapes his surroundings. Destiny stamps each of us.

I cannot tell you how eagerly I am looking forward to your return, which must be in a short time now. I want you to warm me back to life, to the normal life that other people know. I want your love to make of me a woman.

My brown faun, you belong to the glad tender things of nature where the heart is kind. I want you to kill within me the passionless fury of the north. I want you to counteract its numbing and destructive cold.

I sit for hours alone upon the high terrace that overhangs the sea, looking up from time to time at the stars of our Russian night, and they are just as real to me, winking in space, as I, or the life that is mine. That is why I am so brave. I said to Count Esterhazy at a

dinner before I left Petersburg, "There is no other woman so brave as I!" I could stand in front of a loaded cannon as calmly as I sit upon this terrace, because I could not realize the danger. If I could, I might be a coward.

Yesterday, Count Bestushev came down. After supper he sat with me upon the terrace. Summer mist hid the land. It was as if he and I were alone in space. I have never seen the world more unreal. We sat for an hour, I should think, in silence. It seems that that is the way we converse best. Suddenly, he turned to me with that quick movement of the head and hand: "You must kill the Grand Duke! There is no way to get around it. You must kill him! Not to-day nor to-morrow — but when the crash comes."

Nicholas Murievich, it was just as if he said to me, "You must wear your silver embroidered ball gown." The fact behind the words was aeons away and I could not feel it. The water kept singing against the shore. The stars kept on shining in space. Yet, he had said, "You must kill the Grand Duke!" You see, Nicholas Murievich, I am like the stars and the sea. They keep on their appointed way. And so shall I. When he got ready to go, he stood and looked thoughtfully down at the pale Gulf that spread at his feet.

"Some day, Catherine Alexevna, if you are true to me — and you cannot help being — you and I will stand upon the crest of the world, just as we are standing upon this terrace." His thin old voice grew strong and full with the joy of dominance. I thought I could hear it going out over the sea. Then, he left me without even shaking hands. But, after he had gone, his presence lingered on far into the night. Sometimes for days it is beside me all the time like a person I cannot see.

I am alone a good deal at Oranienbaum. The Grand Duke is at Peterhof part of the time, coming down only occasionally for the duck shooting. Elizabeth Woronzov is with him; and so is Countess Bruce, I hear. She is just as wicked hearted as that wizard grandfather of hers whom they nicknamed the " Russian Faust."

The Empress stays on at the Winter Palace. She is too ill to make the summer journey. Besides, it is more like home to her than any other place now that the palace of her childhood in Moscow is burned. And she has no liking for the new one.

I am expecting that every letter from you will announce your speedy departure for Russia. Do come while the summer is here and I am at Oranienbaum!

C. A.

By the Banks of the Pregel.

I arrived just in time. The journey was short, thanks to relays of horses. The couriers I met on the road talked of nothing but the army of Russia. It has filled a continent with terror. One would think it was another incursion of the Huns. They speak of it as of an army of savages whose depredations will make Europe shudder. I hear Austria made the commander-in-chief, Aprakin, sign a pledge that his Cossacks should not pillage nor murder. Really, it is as if the tread of your army shook the earth, it has been awaited with such apprehension.

How Frederick the Great fears it! He is in consternation. The end may be near for him and he knows it. I heard on good authority that he has decided to kill himself in case the ruin of his country cannot be avoided. He has written an apology for suicide. How contact

with Russia makes even great men dream of death! When he heard the Russian army was on the way, he wrote to his brother Prince Henry, "How happy are the dead!"

Now I have seen this army all are discussing I do not wonder. I saw it first under the sullen fog of an August morning stretching away through the wet corn fields that border the Pregel. It was like the on-rolling wave of a Polar ocean. The resourcefulness of genius cannot avert it. Even though the first wave be shattered, others will come, and still others, crushing whatever is in their path.

General Aprakin did not intend to give battle here. He was pushing on to Königsberg, which, as you know, is a Russian city of which Suvarov is now governor. This was his desired objective point. But the Prussian king had given orders to his commanding general, Marshal Lehwaldt, to attack. So you see our attitude was purely defensive. That usually means defeat.

They met near Gross-Jägersdorf. I saw the battle. It was terrible. And there was something pitiful in the great age and indifference to death of the commanding generals. The Prussians were literally cut into pieces. But their bravery in meeting death was marvelous. There is nothing in Europe to equal it, except Gregory Orlov. History does not tell of men braver than he. His indifference to death won the admiration of both armies. Imagine, your Royal Highness, that tall figure of his towering neck and shoulders above ordinary men, bare of head, with streaming hair shining like a flame, wherever death was nearest; laughing deliriously when the bullets hissed past him, as if he were playing with them, just as a boy plays with tossing marbles. He was a splendid and inspired figure, radiant with youth and

vigor, a veritable Apollo, such as the poets of my country have sung of.

I wonder what it was he held clasped in his heart that gave him such courage! I kept saying to myself, "Is it her Royal Highness?" Pardon me this — I will explain it later.

"No," I said. "It is not that. It is ambition. It is belief in his star of destiny. It is belief that he is the favorite of the gods whom nothing can destroy."

After the battle he was as fresh as if he had arisen from his morning sleep. He was the only Russian who gave evidence of a feeling greater than interest.

They were dull, apathetic; a cold, unfeeling mass. I am hastening to get this off by the courier, who is waiting while I write, that you may have the first news of victory. And I am wishing more bitterly than usual, while I send it, that my body could be in Russia to-night where my heart is.

N. M.

ORANIENBAUM ON THE GULF OF FINLAND.

Dearest Nicholas:

The Grand Duke is sending news of everything that goes on to the King. Did anyone ever hear of such folly! Betraying his birthright! Bartering a Russian realm for a Holstein duchy! Poor fool! The King has sent him a ring in acknowledgment. He swears by it as if it were the Holy Mother of God of Kasan. He sees everything in just such disjointed perspective. He is just as wrong-headed as that.

You remember Maschuta the gipsy dancer, of whom I wrote? She is staying in Petersburg for the summer instead of taking up her accustomed vagabondage to southern Russia. She has met the Grand Duke. They say

she has influence over him. I do not like their growing intimacy. I would stop it if I could.

The Grand Duke is at Oranienbaum for a few days now for the duck shooting. I am enjoying the duck shooting, too. Yet it is not really that that I care for. It is need of exercise which I crave more and more. I crave it as greatly now as I did in the winter. I arise at three and dress in men's clothes. An old hunter awaits me with guns and a boat. We row through the Oranienbaum Canal which is two versts wide here where it meets the Gulf. On both banks are water grasses which are full of ducks and splashing water fowl. At this time of year it is day in this latitude. The sun sets only for a little while after midnight. The witchlike daylight night upon this Arctic water with the iris necked ducks flying about us is exquisite. The backs and the heads of the ducks are the color of summer and flowers. But their white, mottled breasts are the color of flowerless winter.

Whenever I see them rising directly above me, I see the snow fields. Even now, in midsummer, Nicholas Murievich, there are cold, white clouds sailing across the sky, that have the chill of winter. Just beyond the smiling blue horizon of this sea the icebergs rest. Winter is never far away from here.

The Grand Duke does not join us until two or three hours later. When he does come, it is with a retinue of servants and a breakfast of many courses. Everything has to stop for this! He cannot do anything without hindering annoyances. There is no surer mark of inability.

After the shooting is over, when the Grand Duke has gone back to Oranienbaum, the old hunter and I drift down the canal as far as the sea. Sometimes, we go out

upon it. This is dangerous. That is the reason I like it. For the moment it gives me the sting of life.

Last week, one day when we were coming back, in about the center of the canal, I got out for another try at the ducks. There, hidden in the swamp grass and rushes, whom do you suppose I met? Maschuta! She divined who I was. She must have known me that night at the Dresden Woman's. When she met me on a sudden in the swamp, her gray eyes became black with hatred. I felt the emotion that swept her. She was disguised as a gipsy. She was worth looking at! I thought of those pictures of youth your French friend Greuze paints. But could he paint a tigress and a woman at the same time? The charm of the one, the muscular beauty of the other? The Grand Duke has hired her as a spy! I feel sure of it. That is the reason she is staying in Petersburg. That is the reason she was by the Oranienbaum Canal. I do not fear her although I know how dangerous she is. When I looked into her eyes, I felt I was the power that some day would pass over and crush her. I feel that no misfortune can touch me. All the time I was hunting that day, Nicholas Murievich, I heard ringing in my heart like a bell, so loudly it seemed to me the world must hear it, what Count Bestushev said, *"You must kill the Grand Duke!"* I did not feel surprise or grief, or any emotion, except a wish that the bell would stop ringing. At the same time I knew that nothing could stop it.

Taken all in all that was an eventful day. Hear what happened next! That night Count Poniatovsky came down in the disguise of a coiffeur to make merry for an hour. We have had fun out of this piece of nonsense. He comes through the rear of the palace like a servant. He plays the part so perfectly you could not tell him

from a professional hairdresser. He really comes into my room and dresses my hair! My maids — who are in the secret — and I, laugh ourselves breathless. Imagine, Nicholas Murievich, that Polish dandy playing hairdresser!

Well, that evening as usual, before supper, he came in by way of the garden. He had not crossed it — in truth I think he had only started to do so — when the Grand Duke ran up and stopped him and said: "Yes, yes! I see that our most indispensable French hairdresser is none other than Count Poniatovsky — our Polish exquisite! What are you doing here in this disguise?"

"I come to pay my respects to your Royal Highness and the Grand Duchess."

"It looks like it, Count Poniatovsky, sneaking in by the garden!"

(You see, Nicholas Murievich, he was so frightened he lost his wits.)

"You came to see the Grand Duchess without my permission or that of her Majesty."

A violent quarrel followed. The Grand Duke called his men. I do not know how serious the result would have been for Count Poniatovsky, had not a Polish friend of the Grand Duke, Count Branitzky, in order, perhaps, to save his countryman's life, come forward. He threw Count Poniatovsky out of the garden, administering admonitory kicks by the way.

Just then a woman's laughter rang out, stabbing the night like a dagger. It was Maschuta! I looked at the Grand Duke. The Grand Duke looked at me. Not a word did we say! But he understands that I know it was Maschuta who learned of Count Poniatovsky's disguise and betrayed the fact to the Grand Duke. That laughter was her challenge to me.

Count Poniatovsky has been ordered to leave Russia. That means another loss for Count Bestushev and myself. Daily some friend is exiled.

Despite such unpleasantly dramatic incidents and the uncertainty of my position, I am enjoying the Russian summer which is fiercely hot. Here, snow falls heaviest in winter and the summer heat is most unbearable. Midday is dull and sullen. Bluish haze hangs over the land. In it the sun rolls about like a red ball. As late as midnight flaming streamers streak the sky and leave faint furrows upon this placid Gulf. Every night the Grand Duke is here; he sits upon the terrace and plays upon his violin. But the past few nights he breaks his playing off to look longingly across the water. Night before last I asked him what he was thinking of after he had sat silent for some time.

"I am thinking how I want to go back to Sweden. It was so peaceful there. I could play upon my violin and be happy. In Russia there is nothing but revolution. The Russians are just a pack of wolves."

He is frail and helpless in this awful Russia. He is as ineffective as a fly upon the horns of an ox. I am sorry he hates me. I am the only one who pities him and understands. I, too, long to get away from Russia.

Ah! dear Nicholas Murievich, it will take a great deal of love's deep forgetfulness in your encircling arms to drive from me, for even a little while, the terror of Russia! You will be on the wing as quickly as this reaches you. I shall count the days until I can look out over the Gulf and fancy that every passing ship bears you back to Petersburg. I shall wonder if you are passing me in the day or in the night. I shall wonder if the breeze that touches my face has first billowed the sails of the ship that is bearing you back to me. Come quickly. Come

quickly while the sun of summer is smiling over Russia. Come quickly, because you know the storms are never far away from here.

C. A.

By the Banks of the Pregel.

Your Highness, what do you think has happened? The most astonishing, the most foolish, the most pitiful, the most ridiculous thing in the world! The Russians are retreating! You do not believe it? Of course you do not! Who could? But it is true. *Retreating!* They are giving up the rewards of victory. Why? No one knows! No one can hazard a guess! And they could march on to-night and take Berlin.

Of course, there are all kinds of reports. Some say there is a plot to bring about your ruin and that of the Great Chancellor. Court couriers are going post haste to Russia. By this judge of the news they bear. They say — that is gossip of the camps — I tremble to tell you — they say that you and the Great Chancellor have secretly recalled the army that you may have their help with which to seize the throne. I know, of course, this is false! But false as it is, it is to be told the Empress to procure your ruin and Count Bestushev's banishment. I believe it is the Grand Duke, by means of some trick — put up, of course, by the Prussian King — who has procured cessation of hostilities. I have not been able to see General Aprakin. They say he looks like a man condemned to death. Death will be his reward for this! The air is as full of rumors and thick flying reports as your Arctic nights of winter of falling snow. I can write no more. This must go.

N. M.

By the Banks of the Pregel.

What do you suppose I have to tell you now, your Highness, by this courier departing hot upon the heels of his fellow? Something most astonishing! Frederick of Prussia has some secret which, when it is divulged, will make you his obedient vassal. It is something that not even your tried strength of will and fortified courage can resist. But no one has had a hint of what it is. Do you know? Can you form a conjecture? It has something to do with your birth, your youth. Now do you know any better than before?

The life, the freedom, the property of no one is safe here in the neighborhood of the Prussian army. The King has everyone arrested and examined every once in awhile, just to satisfy that insatiable curiosity of his. I am going about as a strolling musician. I look the part. All sorts of vagabonds are in the train of the armies. I take my place among them and escape attention.

I could not stay away from you, *m'Amie,* longer even if I would. Daily now my heart flies away from me toward Russia. If I stayed on, some day it would not come back. I am beginning to believe that it is only by the heart that one lives. Any other life is not worthy the name.

N. M.

By the Banks of the Pregel.

What do you think I am bringing to Russia with me, your Highness? It is a gift the like of which you never had — you who have had so many. It is a statuette carven of ivory and set with gems. With it there is a manuscript in Greek. The statuette was found wrapped

in the manuscript. What does it represent? Love! Our Greek Queen of Love, of long ago.

Where did it come from? One of the followers of the army found it in southern Russia where were once Greek cities. You will be astonished when you see the statuette because of a certain resemblance — Of that I will tell you when I see you!

I can hardly wait to give it to you, and to translate the papyrus in which it was wrapped. For this grant one of our old evenings! I shall be in Russia now as speedily as the feet of horses can bear me. Then, for one evening, let us forget intrigue, the burden of living, and your royal state — for one evening — for one evening! You will grant this, I know. You are great enough to pause in the midst of encircling dangers and pluck the fleeting flowers of joy. It is brave to be able to laugh in the face of fate. Perhaps, it is this in you that I have admired more than anything else.

Now I can hear you saying: "Do not admire me! But love me, love me — just as you would a peasant woman! Admiration stands in the road of love." Perhaps it is possible for a woman to be jealous even of herself, of the other woman within her, who has possibilities of brain and soul, and who in time kills utterly that primitive woman who loves only love.

My thoughts, my desires, are flying out to you to-day like a flock of doves, just such doves as in a happier age fluttered about the shoulders of the gay goddess whom we Greeks have loved the best.

N. M.

P. S.— Orlov is departing to-day for Russia. In the morning I set out. It is peculiar how I come after him. To-day and yesterday, too, I had a presentiment of ill

luck. Now, you who have no superstitions are laughing. I feel as if I were setting out to meet — both love — and death. The too strenuous life of the past weeks, and weariness, bring these sad thoughts. Banish them, my love!

N. M.

CHAPTER V

NIGHT IN THE PORCELAIN SALON — THE IVORY VENUS

Nicholas Murievich returned to Russia with Gregory Orlov and some of the men of the court, the last week of September. And that year, as it happened, summer was prolonged into the autumn. If its leaves were gone and its warmer sun, a peculiarly soft, windless interim preceded the winter, a sort of breathing space before its desolation and its storms.

The Grand Duchess, Catherine Alexevna, stayed on at Oranienbaum. Here, on an evening during the last of September, she awaited Nicholas Murievich, in the palace so picturesquely situated upon its terraces above the Gulf of Finland. The Palace of Oranienbaum had been given to herself and the Grand Duke by her Majesty at the time of their wedding. This palace, indeed, had frequently been an imperial gift. Peter the Great built it as a distinguishing mark of favor for his "eaglet," the friend he loved, Alexander Mentchikov, the peasant's son, of whom he made a prince. He placed it upon a terrace just as he had done with his own home, Peterhof, with a splendid and commanding view. And as Peterhof had rooms whose walls were made of malachite and amber, Oranienbaum had rooms of pearl and gold and black lacquer. Viewed at this time from the exterior, it was not a pretentious palace. It was built of wood and was only two stories high. United to the central building

were wooden wings attached by light and graceful colonnades. This made it look as if it were made to be situated beside a sea of Greece, instead of this pale, mysterious water of the north. One of these wings was furnished for a chapel. The other, which all but opened into the Gulf itself, it was so near, contained two salons. The one nearest the water was walled in painted plaques of Sèvres. The other opening out of it was a Chinese room in black lacquer and dull gold. About the entrance, and indeed throughout the grounds now that autumn was come, were placed marble urns which were filled from the hot houses with the rarest of flowers to give as long as possible the illusion of summer and prolific spring.

It was here at Oranienbaum that Catherine Alexevna was her own mistress, because Elizabeth Petrovna did not come here since a tragic occurrence of her youth. And it was here, during the last months of the dying Empress, that she gave some of those sumptuous entertainments which for wasteful extravagance paralleled the pleasures of the Empresses of Rome. It was here on a warm, windless night when the earth had breathed out all its energy upon the sea, that she received Nicholas Murievich. The Porcelain Salon was lighted by tall candles placed in the corners, but not so brightly as to destroy the up-flung reflection of the restless water which slipped its wave-light across the walls. Catherine Alexevna wore one of the gowns of perishable gauze of the period, caught up with *fleurs fines,* real lilies of the valley, moss rose buds and violets. Of jewels she had none. Nicholas Murievich was sitting facing her at a table by the open doors that gave upon the Gulf. Here, they had been dining together, served by Calmucks who were dressed in red and gold, with bright curving knives stuck into their sashes. Now that the dinner was over, they were sipping

wine from carved glasses of Siberian crystal. With the wine and the dessert, came the dinner's *divertissement.* From the Chinese Salon, stepping softly to the music of the *torgane* and the balalaika, played by soft-eyed Don Cossacks, who reclined in a corner upon the floor, floated a ballet of young girls. They wore transparent shirts reaching to the knees, made of gold and silver net. These were girdled at the waist. From the girdles hung bouffant petticoats of strung flowers, below which their bare legs showed. They, who wore gold gauze, had petticoats of the yellow crocus. They, who wore silver gauze, had petticoats of the purple iris. Upon their heads were crowns of the same exquisite flowers of the early far off spring of the south. To the sad music of the Cossacks they danced the dances of Greece.

"This is in compliment to me!" exclaimed Nicholas Murievich, pleasure and appreciation alternating upon his sensitive face.

"The flowers of my Greece! The ones we love best! And the dances, too. Did you know, Catherine Alexevna, that in the songs of your Cossacks, in the melodies of the Ukraine, there is some of the lost music of the Greeks?"

Another self had risen over Catherine Alexevna like a moon of Saturn. Its light was that of the radiant present with its imperious pleasures. She was no longer the royal intrigante. Her blue eyes were dewy with love and tenderness. Under the thin covering of her gauzes her body seemed to be more graciously curved. Nor did the conventional court dress prevent the gay faun from dominating the presence of her companion.

"You have made me see that and many things, Nicholas Murievich," she replied in French, the language of their hours of intimacy.

"Many things in Russia have as foundation the long-

ing for beauty of the Greek. Russia, you see, has no self. She has a divided soul."

"But yours shall be divided no longer," he interrupted gayly, catching up impetuously the drooping inflection of her voice. "Love is going to make it whole."

"Who can tell? It may not be possible." But, while she answered doubtfully, the joy of a child was shining in her eyes.

For a while they were both silent, each buried in his dream, while the slender dancers wove their paces about them, and the faint, vanishing music of the Cossacks, with its pauses like the sighs of unsatisfied desire, shivered upon the sea, as the sea's light upon the swaying dancers. The silence was prolonged until it seemed that Greece with its fabled joy was throbbing back to life again within the room beside the mysterious water of the north. And between the two, like a veiled goddess which might symbolize the unknown ways of life, there rose up to dominate, love and desirous youth.

Catherine Alexevna made a gesture of command. The dancers paused. They took off their crocus and iris skirts and flung them upon the floor until the long salon was carpeted with the flowers of spring. There was a shiver of light in the air. They pulled off their tingling vests of gauze net and swung them above their heads, and stood naked save for silken trunks the color of their bodies. The music arose commandingly. They scampered away into the black and gold Chinese Salon — beyond, which was unlighted — where monstrous grinning heads peered out uncomprehendingly upon their white joy. There they were swallowed up in its yellow twilight just as the Greek cities of Scythia were swallowed up long ago in the growing night of Russia. The Calmucks bore away the table

upon which they had dined. She signalled for the Cossack musicians to follow.

"Now, at last, we are alone, my faun! I am so glad that you have come!"

He went up to where she was standing, when she signalled the tables to be removed, and took her in his arms, running his lips lovingly along the edge of her shoulders.

"Your face, Nicholas Murievich, is like my dream of that south I have longed to see. I wish I could get away and go there with you! I am tired of pomp. I am tired of this stupid, barren magnificence. I want to live differently. I want to get away from Russia!

"Am I changed? Look in my eyes! Tell we what you see there. Is there something dreadful in them, something — How shall I say it? — something mephitic — septemtrional —"

"To me your eyes are just pools of love."

"We must not be serious, you and I. We must be only happy, must we not?"

"Of course, only happy. We must make up for the separation."

"What did you mean when you said in your letter that you had a premonition of ill in coming back to Russia?"

"I told you not to think of that — to pay no attention to it. It was because I was worn out with traveling. When one is weary, one is sad."

"That is true. We will not talk of it. We will not have any blot of unpleasant memory upon our meeting."

"That is best!" Again he folded her in his arms, and the spectral twilight of the sea looked in upon their love. When she lifted her face again it was merry with expectation.

"You are a faun, are you not? Let me see your ears!

Are they pointed? I knew they were! But your gift — where is it?" suddenly remembering his last letter from the banks of the Pregel, and its secret. "You must not forget that. Show it to me! I have thought of it every day since you wrote. It is a Venus, you say. We will be happy as befits your goddess."

"I will show it to you," he answered, merrily.

He went into the adjoining Chinese Salon and took an oblong parcel from a teakwood table by the door, where he had placed it for concealment when he entered.

"I am going to translate into French for you the Greek manuscript in which the statue came wrapped. Let us sit upon this sofa near the sea-doors," he continued, as he came back with the package in his hand. "Here the light of a corner candle will fall directly upon us."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Catherine Alexevna, delightedly, as he held out toward her an ivory Venus.

"It is a work of art, Catherine Alexevna, despite its diminutiveness. It must have been made by one of the masters of Greece."

She held it in her hands and turned it around and around delightedly, the better to admire its loveliness.

"Where did you say it was found?" she questioned, at length.

"At Chersonesus, in the south of Russia, which was once a Greek city. It must have been founded by them before Cleopatra was Queen of Egypt," he explained, unfolding the papyrus wrapping.

"Look at the manuscript! You must not neglect that. It is a work of art, too, and written by a master."

"I wish that I could read the manuscript for myself!"

"But you cannot! What I wish you to notice is how peculiarly the statuette resembles you. Not with exactitude, but a stranger, stronger resemblance, as of spirit

or unmoulded substance made to shelter the same self. Is it not remarkable when one considers how long ago it was made?" he said, touching the shining statuette as he bent to kiss her. "The statuette is for you — a gift. Sweets to the sweet! The manuscript is mine, to keep in remembrance of to-night. Now I will read it to you."

THE GREEK MANUSCRIPT.

I, Greek Chloris, of Alexandria, servant in the Temple of Aphrodite, write this, in the third year of the Great Queen's reign.

I write it as I was taught, in the characters of our Greek tongue, with a stylus of gold, on a tablet of wax, which Gracchus, the scholar, will inscribe for me upon lasting papyrus, and in ink of two colors.

The Queen sent to the Isles of Greece for an artist to make her portrait in marble or ivory.

The artist roaming through the streets of our city, saw a woman of extraordinary appearance. She was unlike other women. Nor could he name her nationality.

The desire came to him to reproduce her. But before he could reach her she had disappeared in the market crowd. Thereafter, he sought her, but without success, until one evening — when he had given over the chase — he chanced upon her walking alone outside the city. He stopped and requested permission to portray her. She refused. Angered at seeing his plan slip away, and without pausing to consider, he picked her up and bore her to his dwelling. Fearing lest she escape, he took her to a workroom which no one entered save himself. Here he chained her to a column of marble telling her that the way to win freedom was to pose as he directed. He determined to make a portrait of her and make the Queen believe it was a portrait of herself.

He shut himself within his room and set to work. He was not seen upon the streets of Alexandria. As he worked he planned. He would copy her body, some careless gesture of head or hand, and thus produce a statue novel and true.

The next time he went to the palace he told the Queen her portrait was begun. He was representing her as Queen of Love. Her beauty had been revealed to him in a vision of the night.

On his way home he pondered over the mystery of his model. Who was she? No information could be obtained by questioning. She had persisted in silence. Then he began to dream fondly of the material he would use in building his masterpiece. At length he decided to make it of that ivory which, in Sidon, they color the hue of flesh, and mount it upon a pedestal of jade. The jade should be set upon a block of amethyst of wine-red purple. The eyes should be sapphires; the points of the breasts coral of palest tint. In the hands and about the feet there should be ropes of pearls. When this jewelled marvel was finished, he took it to the Queen. Beneath her pleasure in the exquisite trifle, and the implied flattery, there was suspicion and jealousy. She could not believe that she looked like this. Was there another woman in Egypt more lovely? As she looked at the statuette upon its pedestal of jade and amethyst, her suspicions crystallized into certainty. It was the portrait of a living woman. If it were not it could not possess such persistent life. In vain did she try to divert her mind with affairs of state. In vain did she drift down the Nile in her cangia, with her there went the thought of the other woman who was fairer.

She ordered slaves to bring mirrors of bronze and to uphold them around her. She found she fell short of the excellence she desired. Beside such linear perfection she was an ordinary woman.

Thereupon, she gave orders that every pale Greek beauty be brought within the palace.

The model, meantime, was dreaming of means to effect her freedom. She had thought it would be easy. No one had resisted her. A Greek sculptor should be the least difficult of men. But she had reckoned without knowledge of facts. She realized that she had met a new man. He did not see her, the woman. Nor, as time passed, did his attitude change. He merely desired to steal her beauty and fix it in marble to assure his fame. She was material with which he was to buy success.

Whenever he left the house, he chained her securely to a pillar of marble and forbade his slaves to enter.

One day he had been working in a part of the dwelling that overlooked the Nile. The Queen summoned him hastily and he forgot to take his model back to the former room. After he had gone, she began to call for help. A pearl diver heard her. He made haste to find where she was concealed. But he was unprepared for the sight that met his eyes. A white woman, who did not belong to any of the captive races, chained to a pillar of stone.

The pearl diver was not an unworthy companion. He was slender. He was graceful as the reeds. The sun and wind had polished his body to the brilliancy of the black basalt stone. His face was stern and pale, characteristics of the perishing races of the south.

He wrenched the chain asunder, almost pulling down the column and the roof it supported. With a like impulsiveness he bore her to where his boat was concealed. He rowed to the center of the river. They floated until on the right shore they saw a ruined tower of terra cotta, surmounted by a giant lotus hewn of stone. Here he took the oars and pulled ashore. When he reached it, his companion was asleep. To his surprise she wore the robe of Isis. When he awoke her to go to the tower which was his dwelling, she met two wonderful eyes looking into her

own. They were fathomless worlds of blackness. In looking into them she recalled the past. It was a world of remembered nights lighted by the moons of love.

The pearl diver forgot his curiosity as to the nationality of his companion. She spoke his language. But he knew that there was no Egyptian blood in her. They lived happily enough together in the terra cotta tower. At night they wandered through the bazaars, past the Theater, the Hippodrome, and the rose-marble façade of the temple of Serapis. They wandered through the sailors' quarter, by the booths of the merchants, or watched the palace entrance for a glimpse of the Queen.

The sculptor had become accustomed to the loss of his model. He had given over the search. He was translating into marble a plaster sketch he had made. He called it Aphrodite. When it was finished, it was placed in the temple in which, I, Greek Chloris, am a servant.

Again, the rumor spread that the Queen was the model. Again, the rumor pleased her until she viewed the statue. Then she saw that it was another portrait of the same woman of whom the ivory statuette had been the first. Jealousy came back. She knew that a trick had been played upon her.

Criers went through the streets of Alexandria to announce that on the first night when the moon was full, there would be a fête upon the river to celebrate the betrothal of the sculptor and the Queen.

News of this the pearl diver brought back to the lotus-topped tower. With it he brought gossip of the Egyptian quarter that the sculptor would be crowned because of a portrait which he had made of the Queen. The people of Alexandria declared that the statue was lovelier than the Goddess of Love herself.

To this his companion listened in silence.

On the night of the fête a yellow moon rose over the mysterious Egyptian land. Palm trees were penciled like plumes. Palaces flung upon the sand shadows faintly pink

like the pale cornelian stone, across which figures moved, white and clear lined. Night transformed the river into a royal road.

In the center of the craft-cortège, where the light fell unimpeded, stood a cangia larger than the rest. In the center of this, upon a dais, reclined side by side, the sculptor and the Queen. The face of the sculptor was pale and stern. His body absorbed the purple night and gave it back again.

The Queen arose. She lifted her arms. There was silence. Thereupon she announced the choice of a future ruler.

There were cries, *"Long live the Queen!"* The scene was blotted beneath flowers. Then, suddenly, the eyes of her subjects were averted. Silence fell upon them. Surprised at the change, she was turning to follow the direction of their eyes, when she happened to notice the expression upon the face of the sculptor. What was written there? His body was rigid. In his eyes there was a look she did not dare to probe.

Beyond, where he was looking, beyond the crowd, where the smooth river shone, a boat floated. Within it, standing upon a green cushion, was a woman whose body was wildly white. Her hair, from which the stars struck light, extended to her heels. Her hands and feet were bound with ropes of pearls. And her eyes were sapphires of sweetest hue. At her feet lay a purple cloak. At the other end of the boat stood a young Egyptian, motionless.

Here was the duplicate of the statuette. The Queen was stricken dumb. Slowly at length from the surprise that disabled her, thoughts detached themselves. And the silence of the people? It meant they, too, understood. The courtiers had seen the statuette in the palace. The people had seen the statue in the temple. And her own name coupled with that other woman's beauty had circled the Inland Sea. These facts she understood.

" Soldiers ! " she called, " bring to me within the palace that white Greek woman ! "

The command had been heard by the occupants of the distant boat. The diver swept the oars. The boat swung southward and disappeared.

That night the Queen paced her chamber and meditated revenge. At dawn the idea came appropriate to the crime and commensurate in cruelty. There was no use in approaching the sculptor for information. She would have no satisfaction from him. Summoning her councillors she addressed them:

" Men of Egypt, I have decided that the sculptor be buried alive beneath the marble pedestal of the statue which is the portrait of the woman he loved."

In silence the sculptor heard his doom, but in his eyes there was no fear.

After the sculptor's death the Queen was still in a fever of unrest. Months later, to make her subjects believe that the subject was forgotten, she gave a masked fête upon the Nile. In this way she might find the woman she sought.

Again the diver brought word of the fête to the terra cotta tower. Again they decided to be present. This time the model wore the robe and veil of Isis. The diver rented in a mercantile street of the Egyptian quarter a long sleeved, bordered robe of the red of Sardis, such as are worn by Lydian men. They hired a pleasure boat and reached the place of the fête. The Queen discovered them. She ordered an official to arrest them and take them captive. She called to her soldiers to surround them. The crowd was breathless with expectation, when, moved by a power which only the gods may possess, the woman rose above their heads. The robe fluttered down. It vanished. At a distance she unwound for an instant the mysterious veil. The frightened Egyptians glimpsed for the first time the stern features of Isis. The boat of the diver became invisible upon the water. The divine face

melted into the night. The frightened people lifted hands of prayer. The Queen had incurred the displeasure of the gods. She had been unkind to Love.

Some months later the diver was wandering through the Greek quarter of our city when he happened to pass the Temple where the sculptor had met his death. He entered the garden that surrounds it because of the coolness of its ten thousand palm trees. He walked on and crossed the portal. He penetrated to the sanctuary. Here, surprise and joy overwhelmed him. He saw again his companion of the lotus tower, whom he had once found chained to a column of marble.

I, Greek Chloris, who was watching concealed behind an incense burner carved of the tiger colored marble of Numidia, saw the statue take fire and step down from its pedestal. I heard, then, kisses. And I, who have always served in the Temples of Aphrodite, heard never such words of love. When the rosy mist had vanished and I could see, there in the center of the room were two statues. The statue of Aphrodite was flushed pink. Beside it stood a statue of youth such as the Egyptians carve out of their black basalt stone, and which held above the head of Aphrodite, our Goddess, pearls of magnificent luster.

I, Greek Chloris, servant in the Temple of Aphrodite, saw this, in the third year of the Great Queen's reign. I write it down as I was taught in the characters of our Greek tongue, with a stylus of gold upon a tablet of wax.

" Remember, Catherine Alexevna, that in the fable the statuette caused the death of the giver. In that respect I trust that history will not repeat itself. And I wish you to remember, too, that Venus is a goddess who is always being born again. Does not the statue prove it? Every period of time that reaches a high point of vitality gives birth to a Venus. She is an indestructible goddess. Men have given her, who is always the same, various names.

She was Ishtar in Babylon, Ashtaroth in Assyria, Isis in Egypt, Aphrodite in Greece, Venus in Rome, and now she is Catherine Alexevna in Eighteenth Century Russia. I bow to *la Venus muscovite!"* he exclaimed, merrily, jest and pleasure ringing in his voice.

" This fable does please me, Nicholas Murievich. But jest aside, the figure has a certain resemblance to me. Only, there is something about the face that is cold — and a little cruel. It is, perhaps, the expression of the soul of an earlier and a different age."

" Of course it resembles you! The men in the army by the Pregel saw it. They spoke of it at once. So did others. It gives them faith in you."

" It makes them think that I am unconquerable. I have thought that, too, sometimes myself," she added, thoughtfully.

" And I have been recreated again after the centuries to love you. Do I not look as if I belonged to the fable? Am I not a diver for pearls? Do you not remember me now? In the fable love brought the marble Venus back to life. I will bring the Muscovite Venus back to life, give her the sense of reality and the warmth of joy. Why should not that be true, Catherine Alexevna? Is not my heart wholly yours? Is it not true that I love you for yourself and not for any other reason? *Nothing is impossible in Russia!"*

She started at the word Russia. It recalled her to necessity. It recalled the present. But the happy dream lent its softness to her face and its pleasant unreality to a future that each day brought threateningly near. Still, there was a little margin of time left over in which to dream and be happy. Nicholas Murievich continued:

" What Count Bestushev said — *in your letter to me* — must be done, must be done. The Grand Duke must die."

She was glad for that margin of time. She wished it might be prolonged into an eternity that would shut off the need of action.

"The Grand Duke must die! You will reign alone. You will be supreme. Then will you not place me beside you? It is you I love, not your position."

She felt the tugging undertow of the sea of intrigue that surrounded her and which would now increase rapidly with the days and which she could not always resist. Soon, it would be sweeping her onward from space to unknown space. She saw this clearly. Yet she could not resist it nor could she grieve. The voice continued:

"To-day men of every position are standing close by the thrones of Europe. Why should not Nicholas Murievich?"

"Why not?" she replied, in a voice she did not recognize, and feeling that nothing was real but the present. Suppose she should take a stand at once and fight for the things she personally desired, the things that were best for her? And yet would it be possible with any show of success as goal? Would anyone have the physical or mental resistance to do it? And if she did do it, was it not true that in the general *bouleversement* there would be no counting upon anything, and greater insecurity would result? Might she not lose what she now had with a possible nothing gained? And what was the use of struggling with the question just at present, anyway? Still, there was a little margin of time. She would talk of something else and forget. She would talk of something else.

"What did you mean, Nicholas Murievich, by saying that Gregory Orlov was like the false hero in the fable?"

"Do you not know yourself?"

"No; how could I?"

"He — of the fable — was false to love and he failed."

"What has that to do with Orlov?"

"Does he not love another?" he questioned, significantly.

"I do not know what you mean now. What is it?"

"Is it possible you have not heard?"

"I have heard nothing."

The desired change of subject was not promising to be too happily forgetful.

"Gregory Orlov is in love with Maschuta. He has been mad over her for a longer time than I can tell."

"Gregory!"

"Yes, Gregory."

"Ah! — now I recall his face that night at the Dresden Woman's, when he looked at her. I wrote you about it at the time."

"For her, Catherine Alexevna, he has committed all the follies a man can commit for a woman. He insisted upon taking her away to the army with him. He felt he could not be separated from her. They have been the talk of the clubs and the salons of Petersburg."

"But I have heard nothing of it!" declared Catherine Alexevna. "Why has it been withheld from me?" she thought, her mind reviewing the subject swiftly.

"Is it because of the liking of women for Orlov? Is it because they wish to see me pay for his attentions? Or, is it malicious pleasure in seeing me duped?"

Then, she realized more forcibly than usual the skill that a person placed like herself must have who is required to go ahead with blindfolded eyes.

"But why has not Count Bestushev told me, Nicholas Murievich? He knows it, of course, since there is nothing he does not know."

" Count Bestushev helped it for a time. He prefers Orlov for several reasons. First, because he is Russian. In addition, he is the idol of the army. And he is ambitious for pleasure, money, not for political power. But most important of all, he knows that Orlov does not love you. For him you would not do extravagant or unreasonable things."

Intrigue! Intrigue! It was an entangling web of infinite extent that smothered and bound her. And there was no way to escape it.

" That is why Maschuta hates me! "

" No, not wholly, Catherine Alexevna. Maschuta does not love Orlov. She is ambitious to take a hand in affairs. She is greedy for power. She hates everyone who has it. She would throw Orlov over to-day for the Grand Duke, if she could get him away from Elizabeth Woronzov."

The words of Nicholas Murievich made an impression upon Catherine Alexevna. As he spoke, a vision touched the surface of her mind, fleeting as a skimming bird's wing, a vision of a cliff by the sea, eaten by angry water into perilous traps and holes, slippery, sometimes of sharp declivity, uncertain; and upon this she was forced to walk under darkness and fog. Then, the vision reduced itself to one of the component parts of which it was composed. The general became the individual and she reviewed quickly the intimacy of Orlov and herself the past winter, their revelries, his devotion. And it had all been feigned! She saw the destructive and humiliating truth. And she saw as plainly as that night at the Dresden Woman's the evil flash of Maschuta's white teeth. She was beginning to see what after years would force her to see time and again, that, despite her beauty and her position, no man would love her for herself.

Gregory Orlov did not love her! His interest in her was self interest. She represented success. When Gregory Orlov was with her, it was not because he wished to be. It was because there, beside her, was the chance of life for him. And yet the game must go on. Always a game! She appreciated at the same time the humor of the situation which made her, the Grand Duchess, dependent upon an officer of the guards, without birth or fortune. Each fact that living taught helped to isolate her, to make her alone. It put into her heart the unuttered desire for love. This clairvoyant vision, that went as directly to basic matter as a burning acid, was tragic. It was not pleasant for her. It was not attractive to others. Where it gained in power, it lost in charm. Each fact of life was like the chisel stroke of a sculptor. Each stroke was cruel and enlightening, and lopped off kindly illusions which were in the habit of sheltering happiness. Each stroke gave distinctness to unpleasant facts that otherwise might have been disregarded.

The pleasant voice of Nicholas Murievich was continuing its murmured accompaniment to her meditation.

"I am telling you this as a proof of my love. I am the only one in the world who tells you the truth freed of selfish interests."

That was a little sentence; but what a world of bitter meaning it held.

"And just as soon as they who are in power find it out, they will try to bring about my destruction."

Was there nothing for them who loved her but death and destruction? Upon her face there was no trace of emotion. Did she feel any? She wished sincerely that it was not so. She would have changed it if she could. But the listening gave her pleasure. The voice went on:

"The eyes of love are sharp, Catherine Alexevna.

They have a vision that equals that of the winged brain of Count Bestushev. Nothing can escape them. Nothing can deceive them."

Catherine Alexevna felt the sincerity of the words. They rang true. She felt the security of a love that nothing could change.

"I believe you, Nicholas Murievich," she replied, finding relief from that torturing vision. Why should she not make this real and permanent, this possibility of love and peace? Why should she not bow to happiness when it presented its smiling face? The tender voice was continuing its accompaniment to her thoughts.

"See! Catherine Alexevna," indicating the pearl-like walls and the sea. "This must be like the places where we met before — in that earlier day. Do you remember?"

The candles were all but burned to their sockets. A cold phosphorescence from the water sent an eerie motion over the porcelain walls until in the colorless light which was neither day nor night, the room resembled the inside of a pearl in some subterranean cavern of the sea. For the moment, it was as if they were generations away from Russia and its turbulent life.

"And you are still clad in the foam of your old sea-birth!" he added, gayly.

Who could resist such infectious happiness? Her heart grew warm in the gracious contact of love and youth. When he spoke again, it was to revert to the difficult present.

"I feel, Catherine Alexevna, that I must impress upon you what will await me, when it is known you love me. My life will be at stake. The ambitious men of Russia will pursue me. It must be kept secret! If it should be known, the only person who could ensure my safety would

be yourself. My life will depend upon you, until you are at the head of affairs."

"You do not think I would fail you, do you? How could you think such a thing?"

"No, not willingly," he answered. "But suppose your hand were forced? Suppose some compelling situation presented itself?"

"I should be equal to it."

"I do not know why, Catherine Alexevna, but I feel impelled to insist upon this. Something tells me that we shall not have — in the present rush of affairs — such another opportunity to be together. Something tells me that there is danger ahead which only you can avert."

Nicholas Murievich put his impetuous young arms about her and together they stood in silence by the open sea-doors, while night silvered softly into a dawn that was as pale as the night had been. He forgot his momentary fear. The old, buoyant happiness reasserted itself.

"Just a little while now, Catherine Alexevna! Just a little while, and we shall not have to part in the dawn like this! Soon, her Majesty will die. The Grand Duke will — will — well, we all know what. It does not take prophetic power to know that. You will reign. And then for love's sake you will put me beside you."

She nodded a happy acquiescence in his arms. And again silence followed.

Suddenly, Catherine Alexevna lifted her head from his shoulder. Her face had changed. It had hardened. It had grown less lovely and perceptibly older. It was not tender with emotion. Her body seemed likewise to have changed, and become less gently lined.

"What is the matter?" queried Nicholas Murievich, looking anxiously into her eyes which were turned toward the doorway that led into the Chinese Salon.

" If you would look, you would see it, too," she replied, disengaging herself speedily from his arms.

" What is it, dear one? " he murmured.

" A black phantom dancing over the flowers there by the Chinese Salon. And it is — *It is Count Bestushev!* "

" It is an optical illusion. That is all."

" No, that is not all. It is taller than he is, Count Bestushev, to be sure. And its legs, like his, are long and thin! They melt into feet, black and thin! They are dancing toward me. And they do not come nearer. They stand in the same place. The arms are as long as the legs. And the face is white and deathlike, yet grinning with the merciless merriment of anger. Not only do I see him, but I feel his presence. I feel his presence! "

" Dearest, that is just one of the Chinese figures in the adjoining room to which the uncertain light gives transient life. The candle smoke is suspended there. Light gives it semblance of motion. Let me kiss away the memory. But what is the matter with you? You, too, have changed. Your face has another expression."

" Nothing at all, Nicholas Murievich. I have just thought again of what you wrote me about the Prussian King, the mysterious something that is going to have such effect upon me that it will bend me to his will. Did you not find out more about it? Do you not know anything definite? "

" No, it was something hinted of, but not explained. His spies will divulge it. They will use it as their last card in stopping the war."

" But now I am prepared for it, no matter how surprising it may be. Is it known that he has this something which will change everything? "

" Yes — I think so — It was the gossip of the army. The soldiers were on the *qui vive* to find out about it."

Again, Catherine Alexevna had become the vigilant woman of affairs.

The mystic love-moons of Saturn had set. In their place was rising the cold, gray dawn of Russia.

"He does not know how I am Russianized — King Frederick!"

"Catherine Alexevna, you seem as far away as if I were by the banks of the Pregel. You are changed."

"No, Nicholas Murievich, I am not changed. Day is near. Worry of affairs is claiming me. I must think of them. It is only by thinking of them that a future is possible."

"But suppose, Catherine Alexevna, in these changing moods that claim you, that something should happen that would separate us. Suppose — Suppose — You know that nothing is impossible here."

"It is impossible! I understand that you love me for myself alone. I hold fast to that."

"In a time like this, of course, no one can guess what the combinations of fate may be."

Then his happy, careless artist's nature reasserted itself and his heart became lyric with happiness.

"What things we will do together, you and I, Catherine Alexevna! Peter the Great worked for the north and the west — for the Baltic. You and I will work for the south. We will conquer Greece and Turkey. Our winter capital shall be Byzantium, which we will rechristen *Czarograd,* the City of the Czars."

For the moment she was swept away by the fervor of his youthful dream, forgetting the folly of it and the difference in rank between them.

"Yes, yes — when you and I are in power! Peter the Great dreamed of making the Baltic the Mediterranean of the north. You and I will go back to the old, blue Med-

iterranean of the south," added Catherine Alexevna, trailing her billowing gauzes across the piled iris and crocus blossoms upon the floor.

"That is what we will do — you and I! When the white flies swarm in the autumn, we will rush away to our palace by the Bosporus. And when the crocus and the iris call the spring, we will come back to Petersburg. My ambitious dreams will fly to the ends of the earth. I will make Russia a world power."

"But remember, Catherine Alexevna, if it should be known — our love — they will kill me. That is why I brought this ivory Love to shield you, to keep whispering to you, *memento!*" he said, kissing her good-by.

Catherine Alexevna stood by the sea-doors after Nicholas Murievich had gone, watching the spectral dawn upon the wilting tropic flowers within the urns beside the entrance, and the bleached, metallic surface of the Gulf. It seemed to her, after a time, that those delightful, happy hours with Nicholas Murievich were something that happened ages ago. She was not sure that they had really happened anywhere. The only thing that told that they had was the ivory Venus upon the sofa by the doors. As she looked, it, too, looked different. It had the dominant whiteness of a fact, of something too real to take its pleasant place among dreaming uncertainties. Everything else had taken on its customary unreality. Her heart felt dry and hard. It was as if she were living somewhere outside herself. She had no desire for rest. She felt the old craving for the things that exhaust the body. Slowly, she made her way to her apartments, down the long Chinese Salon whose black lacquer was dulled, and whose gold showed eerily the shifting foam of her gauzes, and whose monsters seized upon her with their greedy, uncomprehending eyes.

CHAPTER VI

ORLOV

Gregory Orlov moved among the picturesque personalities of Petersburg, a figure at once daring, blond, beautiful and young, and above all the darling of Fortune, who, despite her fickleness, was faithful to him. If he had been given to thought and philosophizing, he would have wondered why, without even desire on his part, he had been lifted from an obscure place among the people to be made the companion of princes. But he did not think very much and he philosophized less. In a life so successfully arranged for him, there was no need. Whenever he wished for anything, he held up his handsome hands and it dropped down upon them.

Gregory Orlov was tall, muscular and lithe, with merry brown eyes, dimples, thick curling hair of gold, and the fair complexion of a child. Years did not change this beautiful fairness; nor did dissipation, nor exposure in the army. He might have been a marble man so little did living mar him. None of the hardships of life touched him. He did not know the want of anything. His wishes were gratified. But in the slow course of time, as the years piled up, he suffered from the overfeeding of prosperity.

There were five of the brothers Orlov. The three youngest were guardsmen, while Alexis, who was the strongest man in Russia and one of the tallest, and Gregory had reached the rank of officers. They were of

obscure birth. They did not possess wealth. The patrimony left by their father they squandered with careless merriment. After that, wealth fell so richly to the share of Gregory and Alexis that they tossed on gold to their greedy brothers. Their beauty and fine figures advanced them in the army. Generals prefer handsome officers. The brothers Orlov were in demand. In addition, they were fearless to a degree that was unequalled. They had nothing but life to lose. If they did not win, they could not be greatly the worse. So they set life gayly on any venture.

Neither Gregory Orlov nor his brother Alexis were men of ability either as politicians or men of affairs, as such things are counted. Nor did they possess cultivation or the refinement of learning. Their rise to world prominence is one of those exhibitions of fact which must be surveyed with wonder. After the death of their father and the squandering of their patrimony, there was a time — although but brief — when they did not possess a copeck. Then they developed a passion for gambling in which they were as reckless as they were successful. Their fame at cards was phenomenal. Luck never deserted them. There were weeks when gold flowed like a river into their rapacious pockets. They became men of fashion, Russian exquisites, whose amours furnished subject of conversation in drawing rooms of Moscow, Kiev and Petersburg. Since his intimacy with the Grand Duchess, the fame of Gregory Orlov had spread abroad. His name was known to the gamins and the *boulevardiers* of Paris. Jests were told at his expense in provincial cities. Allusions to the Russian Apollo were heard upon the stage throughout a continent.

To France he had become the beau ideal of Slavic beauty. Physically he was in truth the fine flower of an

extravagant age. He was gossiped of at the courts of Dresden, Vienna, Berlin, Versailles. Court ladies asked returning ambassadors to tell them of Gregory Orlov. Romantic and impossible stories were circulated at his expense and the fame of a professional beauty had become his.

He possessed a talent for luxurious living which was beginning to express itself in a liking for fine furs, horses and pearls. Since his return from the war, he had been made treasurer of the artillery, and his arms were deep in the gold of Russia. It was since his return, too, that his ambition had begun to take a bolder rise. Nothing was impossible in Russia. No one had better reason to know this than he. Had he not seen old Count Alexis Razumovsky, who was once a church singer in Little Russia, spend his days by the throne? Biron had been a stable boy. And he had ruled! Why should not he? Yet, with him it was not really ambition propelled by reason and expressed in words, it was the blind following of an instinct. He was feeling the electric thrill of the wave of fortune which in years to come was to make him — although an uneducated man of the people — set a pace in extravagant living for a world.

There was just one thing that stood in the way of Gregory Orlov's advancement, and that was his love for Maschuta. Through his amours and adventures he had remained true to this. And this was something to be proud of which Maschuta did not appreciate. Maschuta was dangerous, and difficult to manage. To him she was as fascinating as she was dangerous. She was at once a lure and a menace, which he could not resist. And at present not to resist her was an important hindrance to him. He and his brothers were leading the conspiracy in the army which was to put Catherine Alexevna upon

the throne. When he put her there everything depended — for his brothers and himself — upon putting himself beside her. The presence of Maschuta unbalanced the equation. And yet, it was Maschuta he loved. He had heard floating reports of late, too, of Maschuta's friendship with the Grand Duke. He knew that she hated Catherine Alexevna. He knew that he could not be sure of his control of her.

His attachment for Maschuta was something of years' standing. Now, it had for him the endearing tenderness of the passions that belong to youth. It began when he entered the army, when he was not even a subordinate officer, but merely the petted beauty of superiors. It was in Nishni-Novgorod at the great yearly fair of central Russia. Here he saw her dancing. The first glance bound his fickle heart to her. This was her first attempt to force a way northward toward the dazzling city of her desire — Petersburg. Every day he was in the crowd that watched her. A few years later he found her in Kiev and the cities of the Ukraine, likewise at the fairs dancing. She had not been able to continue her progress northward and had slipped back toward the older cities of the south. It was in Kiev that he became acquainted with her. He too had begun his upward climb and he was wearing the decorations of an officer. In imitation of his superiors whose affairs of the heart were known to him, he determined to have Maschuta. He always had everything he wished, why should he not have her? But to his surprise Maschuta would have nothing to do with him beyond the limits of merry friendship. Even then, young as she was, the gipsy had seen ambition and the flattery of power in the distance, made possible by her dancing, and her personal charm which she was learning to understand and to estimate. Greater than love and its gratification with the

beauty of the Russian army, was her greed for these things. In addition, there was a peculiar hatred in her heart for those who were more fortunate than herself. It was not love or the flattery of a moment which she was eager for, but something better, position and security of living. This happened five years before the time of which we are writing. And now Maschuta, although she still affected largely the dress of a gipsy, was the first dancer of Petersburg and, as regards her relations with men, a woman of unblemished reputation.

On the afternoon on which this chapter opens she had come to Gregory Orlov's rooms to demand that he keep the promise of marriage which he had made when he brought her to Petersburg and procured her admission to the Imperial Ballet School.

Gregory Orlov had just rented and moved into the pretentious wooden house of the court banker, Krulsen, on the corner of the Great Morskoi and the Nevsky Prospect, nearly opposite the Winter Palace. Here he had been living with his brothers in a characteristic confusion of luxury, bad taste and discomfort, since he had been made treasurer of the artillery and wealth had been added to his fame.

When Maschuta entered, he was examining some pearls which a traveling Syrian merchant had left for his inspection, and of which he was becoming an acknowledged judge. He was in the happiest of moods. His face was like a gloom dispelling sun. But a glance at Maschuta's face as she entered told him that the interview was not to be an altogether pleasant one. That day, for the first time, had come to him a sharp impression that she did not belong to the world in which he was moving, that life was placing between them unbridgeable distances of prosperity. Maschuta's dress was somewhat at fault

for this. She did not affect the fashions. She wore her own hair in its natural color. Her costume was still so much that of her race that she was a marked figure upon the streets of Petersburg. This was to her advantage had an artist been the judge. She was something good to look upon. The severe training in the ballet had disciplined her native suppleness and made her the perfection of grace. Her dark beauty showed in brilliant contrast to the powdered, pale women of the court.

"Come over here and see these pearls!" began Gregory Orlov, in that caressing voice which was always his whether he were making love to a pretty woman or buying a horse.

"No; I do not wish to. I am not interested in pearls to-day."

"You are not? I supposed that pretty women always were."

"You have supposed lots of things about women that were wrong, Gregory."

"Now what in the devil is the matter, Maschuta?"

"I should think it was my place to ask that question, Gregory Orlov, instead of you."

"Well, then, ask it if you wish, dear," he replied, in the same tender voice which it took so much to change.

"Well, then I ask it. What is the matter?" taking a chair in a corner of the room and folding her arms and looking at him sidewise with eyes that were limpidly green.

"Matter with what?"

"I suppose you have forgotten."

"If there is anything wrong, I have forgotten — or else I never knew."

"Of course you have forgotten, Gregory! You always forget everything in life which you do not wish to recall.

Or, if you do not forget it, you smile it out of sight in that triumphant way of yours and talk of something else."

"Honestly, Maschuta, I haven't the least idea what you are talking about! I saw you day before yesterday and everything was as usual. What has happened? If anything has in the meantime, I am sure I haven't an idea what it is."

His handsome face beneath its crown of curls looked sweetly puzzled.

"It did not happen day before yesterday, Gregory. You know very well that it did not. It has been happening for five years — ever since I came to Petersburg."

"Now, Maschuta, you are not going over that old affair again to-day, are you?" moving toward her with a gesture of caress.

"I did not come here to-day, Gregory, to be petted into forgetfulness. If you love me as you say you do, why do you not keep your promise and marry me?"

"Think of the condition of things now, Maschuta, the excitement, the uncertainty and the expected change in the government."

"A year ago, before you had this present position, it was lack of money. Now it is something else. It will probably always be something else."

"If you have my love and my devotion what more can you ask? What more can you wish for?"

"A position beside you in the world. I am tired of being a dancer, a mountebank. I want something that will last. When my beauty and my youth are gone, where shall I be? I want a position beside you in the world."

He looked at her, and then he thought of the great ladies with whom he was upon intimate terms. Position was just the thing that he had learned to understand and

value. And that position which she coveted was placing daily a wider abyss between himself and a dancer.

"If I should marry now, it would be fatal for my advancement and my brothers. My career would be at an end. We have no fortune. Have I not done a great deal for you as it is? I have paid for your education. You are the first dancer of Petersburg. You owe that to me! That is something. You are no longer obscure. If you really love me, if you believe in me, why can you not give yourself to me without a ceremony that would wreck my future and that of my brothers? You ought to have some care for my future after all that I have done for you. Of course — in a year, even — I may be able to marry you. You can have a home. I will pay for it. Surely you can trust me to care for you."

"Ah, yes! — and trust you to forget me, too, just as you have done with the others — if you once got things your way!" she added, *soto voce.*

"Come, Maschuta, that is not the way to talk! You know that you are the only woman I have loved. There are plenty of women in Petersburg who would be proud of that! Whatever I have done my heart has been yours. In all these years it has never faltered in its devotion to you. Is not that something worth while? There is no other woman who can boast of the love of Orlov."

"Then you refuse? Is that what I am to understand?"

"No; I do not refuse. I merely defer — and only for the present. I do not do that because I wish to, but because I am compelled to. Just as soon as I have a firmer hold upon my future I will do as you wish — and as I wish, too. It is just as great a grief for me as it is for you. And it seems to me, Maschuta, that the nature that is moved always by ambition and never by love, or any unselfish instinct, can be found fault with, too."

Green sparks darted from Maschuta's eyes.

"That is just like you! You criticize me for the instincts of self-preservation. While you sacrifice me daily to all your caprices and those of your family."

Maschuta's eyes narrowed to a green and baleful line of light. Before Gregory Orlov could find time to reply, the Grand Duke's pockmarked negro dwarf, Narcissus, followed by his dog, Mopsinka, appeared upon the threshold with the lack of ceremony permitted to fools and jesters.

"Hello, Narcis! What did you come to wheedle me out of to-day?" exclaimed Orlov in a voice that welcomed the interruption. Narcissus, grinning like a hideous pumpkin lantern, seated himself upon a little gilt chair beside the inlaid table whereon the pearls were piled before replying.

"Nothing, sir. Nothing at all! Unless you really wish to give me something."

"Well, then, what did you come for?"

"I bring a message to you. Her Highness, the Grand Duchess, is moving back to Petersburg the night after tomorrow night for the winter. She wishes you to come down to Oranienbaum late and drive back with her by the river-road."

"Tell her Highness that I obey with pleasure."

The black, shapeless head of Narcissus rolled around upon his neck in stupid acquiescence. But there was a malicious glint in his eyes the while. In his heart, which one would hesitate to think was as unlovely as his body, he hated everyone except the Grand Duke, his master. For him he had a dog's devotion. For Maschuta he had a feeling that was a little warmer than toleration, principally because he reckoned her in the same class as himself and not at all his superior. She received ap-

plause in the Imperial Ballet for her dancing; he received applause in the imperial palace for his antics. Were they not, therefore, in the same class?

Still, he sat there watching for an opening to make some undesirable remark. When he could stand the silence no longer, the vicious little dwarf piped up in his shrill and nasal treble, "Here's a new puzzle or mebbe it's a new conundrum!"

The remark did not meet with encouragement. Orlov had had a few memorable encounters before with the ugly tempered little creature. He did not care to renew or enlarge them. But Narcissus was not to be discouraged so easily.

"Perhaps *you* could guess it better than anyone else, Gregory Orlov! I expect there are people who *think* you can."

"Well, out with it then, Narcis!"

"Where do you suppose the Grand Duke is going to go to spend the winter?" looking maliciously at Orlov.

Maschuta's eyes opened, sparkling like those of a wary animal.

"I am sure I do not know, Narcis."

"They say you do, Gregory Orlov."

"Come, come, Narcis! Don't be a real fool just because that happens to be your profession."

"I can guess, Narcis! Try me!" interrupted Maschuta.

"Go ahead."

"It is a country to which a short broad road leads — but from which there is not any road to lead back —"

The face of Narcissus changed with anger.

"Lots of people travel that road — and some of them unexpectedly, Mademoiselle!"

"You do not understand me, Narcissus. Tell your

master that Maschuta says for him to be careful."

The dwarf's expression changed to one of quick cunning, followed by a flash of animal-like gratitude.

"This is one of the times, Narcis," said Orlov, sternly, "when, if you do not disappear quickly, you will get something near where your pockets are situated that is a good deal heavier than gold."

Narcissus slid down clumsily from the gilt chair, his huge head almost overbalancing him and shuffled away, a leering, cruel smile twisting his hideous face, while Mopsinka trotted gently after.

"You should know better than to interfere in a conversation of that kind, Maschuta. If you had lived in court circles as long as I have, you would have learned to control your tongue or lose your head."

"Are words worse than deeds, Gregory Orlov?" she flung back, in a voice that was like the sobering thrust of a dagger.

"They are the wicked seed from which unaccountable deeds grow, Maschuta, when they are thrown about as you throw them. You know our Russian proverb, 'It is foolish to set the bear upon the shepherd or the swine upon the gardener.'"

"I can recall another Russian proverb to you, too, Gregory Orlov, and an excellent one for you to remember, 'A woman is not a harp to be played upon and then hung upon a wall to rust.'"

"There is no use in quarreling, Maschuta. You may as well give it up. I can do what I can and I cannot do anything else," his face growing sullen and determined.

The autumn afternoon was paling as it sloped toward the early dusk. The harshly gilt furniture in the too ornate room was glinting softer, and the pearls upon the table had lost their gay sea-luster and were just little dull

drops of shimmerless snow. In this drooping light the eyes of Maschuta, startlingly pale by contrast with her dark, gipsy face, were like angry water under the restless changes of a sky at night, greenly malevolent and somber.

"Well, it is all right, I suppose. Everything is, if you happen to be able to see around it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the Grand Duchess will do to you just exactly what you are doing to me. She will use you for her purposes, fool you, and then throw you over —"

"You mean —"

"That when you kill the Grand Duke —"

"*Maschuta!*" thundered the horrified voice of Orlov.

"I mean just what I began and I am going to finish it. You will kill him."

"Maschuta, by the Holy Mother of God of Kasan, if you say that again, I will knout you — as much as I love you —" he added, his voice shaking with passion.

"No, you will not, Gregory Orlov. And I shall say what I wish — you think you will marry the Grand Duchess, that sometime you will be Emperor of Russia —"

"You are jealous. A jealous woman has not a grain of sense."

"No; I am not jealous. You do not love the Grand Duchess. I know that. So how could I be jealous?"

"Love her? Of course I do not! I never dreamed of loving her. She is a part of prosperity — my future. That is all she is to me. That is all she has ever been. I hate bookish women! I love only women like you. And there is no other you."

"She will not marry you. She will use you — your popularity, your influence in the army, to help herself

to the throne. And then she will toss you over for a man who does love her. Believe me, Gregory Orlov, she is not spending all her time in hunting ducks or in dreaming over books."

"Of whom are you talking?"

"If you were not such a conceited fool, you would not have to ask — Nicholas Murievich, of course!"

"Nonsense! He is only a musician."

"All right! Call it nonsense if you wish. Biron was only a stable boy. It is no affair of mine. You are the handsomest man in Russia,— but you will never wear its crown. You may have everything else, but that you will never have. It will always elude you, and for reasons that you will find as unreasonable as I find yours."

"What do you know about Nicholas Murievich? He has played for her once or twice and you have jumped at conclusions, wildly, I suppose, as usual."

"There is no one who knows the Grand Duchess less than you do, Gregory Orlov."

Surprise for an instant made almost brilliant the sensuous face, until it passed into a look of sudden fear.

"How can you tell?"

"No one can judge a woman but a woman."

He faltered in his pacing up and down the room. What if this were true? There is always a chance for error.

"There are corners of their souls that only a woman's eye can scan."

What if this were true and the sun of fortune were rising upon a new favorite! But he replied as boldly as ever:

"That is one of your notions, Maschuta. If you were a gipsy fortune teller, such foolish sayings would be in place — when you talked to a pack of old women —"

"The Grand Duchess is not like other women, Gregory Orlov. There is something about her that is out of the ordinary. I felt it that night at the Dresden Woman's. I have felt it at other times, too. I have seen her soul. I know. We gipsies have an instinct that other people do not have. Besides, she is cleverer than you are, Gregory Orlov. And she knows enough to conceal her cleverness. It is a woman to be reckoned with who knows enough to do that! You and I cannot tell what she has learned out of those books that we know nothing about. I cannot read at all. And you might as well not know how for all the good it does you. She does not value you for your brains. She does not love you for your beauty. You are useful to her because you are of pure Russian blood, and because you are the darling of the army, and the army she must have."

"Enough, Maschuta. Words! Just words —"

"Time will prove or disprove it, Gregory Orlov. I can wait. There is a road made for everyone to travel."

Silence fell between them with the falling of her prophetic voice. Silence fell upon the world outside, too, with the falling of the autumn dusk. Gregory Orlov paced the floor abstractedly, a new and unsuspected fear fermenting within his brain, while Maschuta sat catlike in her corner with baleful, concentrated eyes and watched him. At length he paused before her and looked sternly down:

"Just what is it you know, Maschuta, what fact? Tell me!"

"If I did, you would say —'Words. Just words!'"

"Tell me. I will judge for myself."

"The girls of the Imperial Ballet School danced for her and Nicholas Murievich the other night at Oranienbaum — in the Porcelain Salon. She was celebrating his

return from France and Prussia. They were alone together there a good part of the night —"

"How do you know?"

"I was there, too, outside — listening. In addition the girls of the ballet told me."

"What did you hear?"

"Not everything, of course. But enough to tell me that she loves him. They are planning for a future together."

As Maschuta repeated the last words slowly, she saw the face of Orlov grow white. But for her there was little triumph in this. The revenge reacted upon herself. She realized upon the instant that the man beside her would sacrifice everything — even the woman he loved — for this newborn dream of a throne. And the face that looked up at him was as white as his own. At that moment it was as if Death, a white figure made of the rising mist outside, floated between them sweetly and coldly wearing the face of the goddess of Love. Into Maschuta's eyes there leaped that look of fated intelligence that comes when the heart is pierced. She recovered poise quickly. Determination hardened her face.

"She, too, is planning for the Grand Duke's death."

These limpidly spoken syllables with their scornfully allusive accent upon the two first words were a challenge.

"They planned it that night. I heard them! Count Bestushev has planned it too — and —"

"And you sent word to the Grand Duke from my rooms by that vicious dwarf, Narcissus! You warned him. Only a mad woman would do a thing like that! What do you suppose that may do to me? That tongue of yours will be the death of us!" commencing again his worried pacing of the floor.

"I did not send word to the Grand Duke to get even with you. There is no need of doing it. A cleverer woman than I will see to that."

He paused and faced her.

"You will kill the Grand Duke."

"Maschuta, I have warned you."

"She will lure you on to do it with promises which she has no intention of keeping. You will commit a crime and Nicholas Murievich will gain a crown."

"Maschuta! There are spies everywhere. The walls of our houses have ears. The Empress still lives, you must remember, and you and I might be sent to Siberia within the hour — or, which is worse, thrown into a dungeon."

"You will kill the Grand Duke —"

"By the body of Holy Isaac I will knout you if you persist."

"And then you will keep putting me off with this excuse and that excuse. If you should marry the Grand Duchess, you would send me away to France or Italy to live, with a few thousand rubles, as the acknowledged *prima ballerina* of their Imperial Russian Majesties. You know that you are planning to kill him, and for that very purpose. You cannot lie to me —"

"Maschuta!" thundered a voice that was not recognizable in its terrified cruelty, as he snatched a jewelled knout from the wall.

"Strike me if you dare! If you do, I will kill you!" — leaping like a cat to the center of the room and defying him with astonishing audacity.

"Orlov!" with the word that vibrated sharply across the tawdry room, the form of Count Bestushev-Rjumin towered in the doorway, in the dim light appearing grotesquely exaggerated in height and thinness.

"Orlov, hang up that knout."

Surprise held the arm suspended. Surprise, likewise, and anger held the tongue bound. At length, finding relief for arrested motion in words,

"Am I not master in my own house?"

"Yes! And I am master in Russia."

Eyes looked into eyes. The one who commanded was so frail and so old that the lightest blow could crush him. But there was something within him that was greater than physical strength. He possessed a power that muscle might not resist. Not many had withstood that glance of command. And Gregory Orlov had reasons for obeying.

"Maschuta here, of the Imperial Ballet, is the property of the crown. Over her I throw its protection," making a gesture with the witchlike arms. In the silence that followed, so taut were nerves strained, one could hear the falling of the mist outside. Then, as usually happens in the first moment of relaxation, each material object became more harshly visible: the clear green eyes of Maschuta like hard translucent gems; the cold white scattered pearls, the pallid Sèvres plaques that rimmed the table; the ghostly old man with the sunken eyes of fire; and the sullen, wet autumn night that was shutting down with cold, floating mists that dazzled with their mystery, as if the Polar waters were closing in upon them. Each felt in his heart a premonitory shiver of days that were soon to be.

"Come, come Orlov!" in a changed voice, as he entered the room. "Hang up that knout. And you, Maschuta, put away that little piece of steel you are concealing."

In the sullen face of Maschuta there was no gleam of gratitude. Gratitude was not a mental equipment which

she considered worth while. Besides, this old man had the secret powers of mind which she herself possessed. In addition, she recognized in him the effective spring that moved everything, and in ways which were fatal to her.

The afternoon had been disastrous. She felt the fulfillment of her desires slipping away from her. And she felt dimly that these two men represented something great and epochmaking that was approaching, something which she had not suspected and which she hated and feared accordingly. The animal instinct to wound in return rose up within her. With a bravery that was reflected in the heart of each in unspoken admiration, she made erect the childish figure and looked them unflinchingly in the eye, just as she did her audience when she responded to applause in the Imperial Theater.

"Have a good time, you two, who rule Russia now! Have a good time! Your day is short — like mine. Fate is doing to you the same thing she is doing to me. But you who are highest have farthest to fall."

The face of Count Bestushev-Rjumin took on the expression that had given him the nickname of the "Russian Fox." He knew that she had been the paid spy of the Grand Duke. He knew that she could divulge important secrets, and that now she was in the mood to do it, if the mood were not changed. And his opinion of her beauty was a good deal higher than his opinion of her intelligence. Lest he jostle her and discontinue the course of her thinking, he annihilated for the moment the pulse of thought within himself.

"When the great secret is out, what will you do — you two? The great secret! The great secret!"

Emotion lifted her to the edge of the precipice. She could not resist the call. She would take the plunge and

tell. The iron will of the Great Chancellor was beating her steadily toward it. He stood with high folded arms and thin concentrated lips looking at her. The silence was to her brain what suffocation is to the lungs. It gave her the impulse to shriek, to utter wild words. His silent figure seemed to grow taller, more commanding, an awful figure of vengeance and doom. And his will was beating her out from under the safe shelter of prudence and wisdom, just as the gamekeeper beats the pheasants out into the open to be shot. She could not resist the force longer. It was unendurable. It was as full of suffering as physical pain. In the strained silence the mist outside was loud as rustling gauzes, and now, occasionally, it showed a silver dagger of rain, the threatening weapon of the storm.

The pressure of the moment was more than she could bear. The last rag of resistance had been whipped away like the last tattered rag of a sail in a storm. With defiance and joy ringing in her voice she said:

"The Grand Duchess of Russia is the natural daughter of Frederick the Great! Petersburg is filled with his spies. Some of them are commissioned to tell her. When she knows this — when she knows this, and gives him a voice in affairs, what will become of you, Count Bestushev-Rjumin? Then who will be supreme? Then who will rule Russia?

"And when the Grand Duke dies — as you two know very well that he will — and soon — what will become of your ambitious dreams, Gregory Orlov? When the Grand Duke dies and the Duchess marries Nicholas Murievich!"

The face of Count Bestushev-Rjumin did not change a muscle. He had found out what he wished to know. This, then, was to be the card played by the wily Fred-

erick to stop the war against Prussia, save Berlin from the plundering of a foreign army, and depose himself. If this failed, what then? He must find out. This, evidently, was the secret of which Catherine Alexevna had hinted. This was the secret brought back by the soldiers from the banks of the Pregel. But Frederick of Prussia always kept a safe alternative on hand in case of a first failure. What was that? He did not need to question. Maschuta stood before them foaming with words of wrath:

"You think, both of you, that the Grand Duchess is the only person in the world! Did it never occur to you that she can die just as well as the Grand Duke? Is she not flesh like the rest of us? Why have you not thought of this? The masked ball is coming, Count Bestushev-Rjumin! The masked ball is coming! Strange things happen then. People have disappeared at the masked ball and never been found again. Wait until the masked ball comes!"

Count Bestushev-Rjumin had now found out more than he wished to know, but his face was as impassive as before. The astonishing disclosure vanished into the depths of that secretive intelligence as pebbles vanish into the sea. It left not a ripple upon the surface.

"And Nicholas Murievich?" he thought. "Well, well! Well, well!"

The impression made upon Gregory Orlov was different. He had forgotten his anger of a little while ago. Another emotion had taken its place. He was filled with pity for this beautiful creature who was stung to futile rage that meant death, perhaps, to herself, while its foolish speaking was giving the means of salvation to the others. Poor little Maschuta! Grief was heavy within him and a feeling that she was swinging out beyond

his power to save. Poor little Maschuta! Why had he not given her a present and sent her home, instead of quarreling with her? Pity awoke to fresh life the love he had always had for her. Again, she seemed to him some helpless strayed creature of the forest that had wandered into the city where it was futilely trying to preserve its life from carriages and crowds. Poor little Maschuta! By force of contrast he thought of Catherine Alexevna and the self-control that the training of years had given. For an instant he felt a shiver of repulsion for that cold, selfish intelligence.

When she had finished, Count Bestushev-Rjumin, with a gentle and forgetful smile that banished the words she had said as if they were as inconsequential as current society phrases, turned to her pleasantly. His air of command had vanished. He was just a frail old man now with a face of gentle, almost senile, kindness. In his voice, as he spoke to her, there was a note of fatherly consideration.

"You should have been an actress, and a great tragic actress, Maschuta, instead of a dancer!"

Relief was evident upon her face, now that she had paused for breath and realized with what audacity she had been addressing the Great Chancellor, whose word Europe obeyed, and the most terrible man in Russia. Instantly, her mind went over the stories she had heard of him and his uncanny powers. She drew a breath of thankfulness that he did not seem disturbed at the news. It must be that he knew it before, she meditated, or else deemed it of slight importance. She pulled herself together from fright of realization of what she had said, while her anger subsided.

"You might have been like the actresses I heard in England. The stage is a great institution there."

His manner was kind. It put Maschuta's little fears to sleep. The Calmuck servant came in bringing candles. By their light the Great Chancellor looked older, and frail, and pitiful, as their uncertain flames painted black shadows beneath his eyes, and his purple veined hands, which were spotted with age, began to tremble weakly. Maschuta was rapidly reversing her judgment of him. Her hatred was fading away.

"I do not know but we shall have to give you some dramatic schooling abroad somewhere. We cannot have Russian genius going to waste like this."

Oh! they certainly were mistaken who told such stories of him. Perhaps the Grand Duke, too, is wrong, she thought. The Grand Duke is none too intelligent. Perhaps he is not the terrible man they picture him.

Gregory Orlov was of a different opinion. He knew that the "Russian Fox" was never so dangerous as when he was in this gentle voiced mood. It meant that he had found out by accident something that he was eager to learn, something of great importance, and that he had come to some inexorable decision. It meant that he would strike quickly and without warning, and that no one would know whence the blow came. The mood was the result of self-satisfaction, and determination to act quickly and under cover.

Poor little Maschuta! How he pitied her! She was smiling up at him now quite trustfully. How could she be expected to understand the man whom the diplomats of Europe could neither measure nor forestall? And how eager he was for them both to forget! The news was too precious to be touched by the tongue of conversation. Therefore, he was quick to change the subject to something personally interesting to her. Count Bes-

tushev-Rjumin believed that all women have long hair and short thoughts.

" Now, my pretty little Gipsy, if Gregory Orlov should have another attack of ill temper, you will know whom to send for, will you not? "

Maschuta nodded amicably, her face becoming merry and natural. And what an unprecedented honor, to be addressed as an equal by the Great Chancellor! " Perhaps," she thought, " he is going to fall in love with me just like Gregory Orlov."

" It takes us to straighten Orlov out, does it not? "

" Sometimes, Count Bestushev, Gregory acts just as if he thought the world were coming to an end."

" Well, well, Little One, you and I can manage him! You can depend on me."

He looked at them intently for a moment. His voice changed and faltered:

" How old I feel beside you two gay flowers of youth! How old! How old! "

As he said this in a sad and wistful manner, he appeared to shrivel to such tenuity of body that it seemed as if he must float about like the shadows of the wavering candles. He was like a spirit that had lived forever and could not be released. The black, measureless weight of uncounted centuries hovered over him. His hearers felt the sadness of death and time upon them. The present, with its grief and intrigue, was trivial in comparison with the prodigious past that he must know.

And this was part of his magic, to disarm before he struck. It was safer for him. And it was so much surer. He never played with a possible margin for loss. That margin had gone long ago to swell the wealth of his resourcefulness.

"Good night, my pretty little Gipsy. Good night, Orlov. I am very tired. I must go."

"Good night, Count Bestushev-Rjumin," replied Gregory Orlov, bowing, obsequiously polite, as the thin old figure, that had entered like a whirlwind of wrath, tottered weakly through the lighted doorway.

Maschuta caught a glimpse in the hallway outside of the yellow, ugly face of the old man's Calmuck servant who was waiting to attend him home.

"What would I not give to know what is in his mind now," thought Orlov, as he watched him disappear into the outer hall. "Whatever it is, it will not affect me personally — my life. That is safe enough. I am useful to him. But the others! The Grand Duke, Nicholas Murievich, *Maschuta!*" He caught his breath in fear.

Clearly he saw her danger. Poor little Maschuta, what did she know of this game in which a human life is of no more account than the dust that the wind blows! Again, he saw her a helpless creature darting about among the crowding carriages of Petersburg, seeking a place of safety.

"Maschuta, you must leave Petersburg for a few months — and leave at once!"

"You wish me out of the way, do you?"

"Listen to me, Little Sweetheart, and put away your anger. It is for your good, not for any object of my own I wish you to go. You must feign illness, get leave of absence from the Imperial Theater, and go south — for your health — perhaps to Moscow, or Kiev, whatever place suits you best."

"And be forgotten — and never come back to Petersburg?"

"You do not understand and I cannot explain to you."

" And then, in that length of time, Count Bestushev-Rjumin will forget about me and the dramatic school to which he is going to send me. You make me lose everything that is worth while. My interests are of no consequence."

" Dearest One, listen to me. I am trying to save your life. I know this world of court and intrigue better than you do. For you to try to tell me about it would be like my telling you how to dance. I love you, Maschuta! The things that I have done that have made you angry I have been forced to do. You have judged them wrongly. You must listen to me. When you are traveling in a land you know nothing of, you must let them who live there guide you. It would be impossible to know the way. It is folly to be wise unwisely. Just this time, do as I wish, Dear One!

" I will never ask you to do anything that you do not wish to do again. You must go! *And to-night!* There is not a minute to lose. I will see her Majesty for you myself in the morning."

" Why should I do such a foolish thing? I will not! If you are tired of helping me, if you are losing interest, I will see what Count Bestushev-Rjumin will do. You heard what he said! "

" You do not understand Count Bestushev, Little Love — Count Bestushev is — *is* —" He did not dare to say it. Not even for the woman he loved. He dared not risk one explanatory word against the Great Chancellor. There was only one way. He had tried it and failed.

" Maschuta, if you will leave Petersburg for three months, get leave of absence on pretext of illness, I will marry you at the end of that time. I will marry you. I swear it by all the saints of Russia! What more could

a man say to a woman to guarantee his good faith than I am saying to you?"

"But I will not go, Gregory Orlov! I will stay right here. I will be a great actress in the English manner. I will have Russia at my feet."

"Can you not care for anything but ambition, Maschuta? Is there no love in your heart?" he said, in a dull, saddened voice, seeing afresh the emptiness of her nature, yet feeling for her the same old pitying love.

"Come, dear Little Sweetheart, be guided by me — this once — just this once!" folding her within his arms and kissing the angry eyes.

"No, I will not, Gregory Orlov! This once I will do just as I please. And one of the things I please is to go back to my apartments now."

"Wait a moment, Dearest!"

He summoned a servant.

"Have Mademoiselle Maschuta driven to her apartments by the Fontanka."

"Do not feel bad, Gregory! You will be glad that I am not going away. You know you will! How could you get along without me? You could not! See, Gregory — To show you I am forgiving you, I am kissing you. Lift me up — *higher — there!* Right on the end of your nose! Good night, Gregory! Good night."

CHAPTER VII

THE FATAL NIGHT AT ORANIENBAUM

There was something besides the petted caprice of a pretty woman in Maschuta's resistance to the pleading of Orlov. She had made up her mind to listen once more at night by the doors of the Porcelain Salon that gave upon the Gulf of Finland. She would know from the testimony of her own ears and eyes just the sort of thing that Gregory Orlov meant to Catherine Alexevna, and just what were the plans which she believed that he was concealing from her.

Oranienbaum was wearing no longer the air of summer festivity that had distinguished it on the night when Catherine Alexevna had celebrated the return of Nicholas Murievich from the war by the Pregel. The flowers were gone, and the mellow moon, and the thrill of summer. Dried and shriveled stalks hung dismally over the marble urns. The gardens were dim and dismantled. Dirty fishing boats did not dot the deep, nor the gay sails of merrymakers. The earth was a faded yellow that was losing its gold; that tragic yellow which is the color of regret. The Gulf was gray and blurred by ripples that shivered. The sky was a dull monochrome that bent over the earth, against which, from time to time, were etched the thin, black lines of frightened birds hastening to the south. But underneath this dismal hollow there was quiet. The winds were still. It was as if the cloud-wall held at bay the winter, its swirling snows and

bitter nights. Over the fields and the Gulf and the marshy road by which the pale moss lay, over the wooden Finnish village, which the founder had called Petersburg, lay that unearthly and terrifying silence which in Russia precedes the first falling of the snow. In the soul of Catherine Alexevna, who was standing by the open doors that looked upon the Gulf, there was the same terrifying silence, which she, likewise, knew to be the silence that precedes the storm. But she neither feared it nor regretted its necessity. She felt as if the same force had passed over the mind and the heart of her that had passed over the world of nature, killing the flowers.

The occasional sensation of old, that she was a mirror that reflected life but could not feel it, was becoming permanent. Life was a pageant floating across the mirror surface of her heart. She no longer felt the old grief of the impetuous letters to Nicholas Murievich, the longing to put a stop to the peculiar death that was creeping upon her. Instead, her intellect merely kept record of it coldly.

The change in the mind and the nature of Catherine Alexevna had brought about a similar change in her body. It had grown thinner. It had hardened. It had lost flexibility. It resembled marble. As she stood by the doors, dressed in the traveling gown in which later that evening she was going to drive back to Petersburg with Gregory Orlov, a faint breeze like a sigh from the sea slipped drily across the faded flowers that swung from the urns. With it the thought slipped across her mind that like these flowers had become her youth.

Oranienbaum was lonely now, especially at this hour. The Gulf was just such a monotony as life is without love. In Petersburg, at least there would be window lights. There would be people. There would be voices

and laughter. The next night, too, was the masked ball, she reflected, which meant the opening of the court season. It was the first revelry of the Russian winter. At this masked ball strange things had happened. Who could tell what to-morrow night might bring forth? Petersburg was filled with the spies of all nations. The city was in a ferment. Everywhere was restlessness, dissatisfaction. Court factions would be busy with their plots. They would not let such an opportunity go unused. Danger would be an unbidden guest.

She had received a note that morning from Nicholas Murievich telling her that something was on foot against both herself and him, but that he could not find out what. She must be on the alert. Perhaps, the lives of both were the issue. She must not falter! She must be equal to the occasion. He knew, of course, that she would be. He had no fear. The letter was pitiful in its deep and trusting love, and in the understanding that his life depended upon her.

This letter was followed by another from Count Bestushev-Rjumin, a letter of unexplained command to the point that she must wear a plain, black domino to the masked ball, and one several sizes too large so that it would effectively conceal the figure. With this she must wear a black hood, likewise large, and a black mask. And the costume was to be kept secret from everyone, not excepting Gregory Orlov and her maid, Mafra Savischna, until she was ready to dress for the ball. In addition, there was a postscript which said, *"Do not interfere with the command I have given to my Calmuck slave for to-night."*

The importance of this letter she estimated from the fact that it was written in his secret cipher. It contained no other information. But she knew that behind

it lay a plot. She knew that it was the small hinge upon which some great door turned. With the knowledge came no emotion. It was an unchangeable thing, like the rising of the stars.

The gaunt reeds by the Oranienbaum canal shivered. She heard them with a thrill of memory. There was the sound of dried grass trodden stealthily, and the form of Maschuta crept up over the terrace. Upon the instant Catherine Alexevna was alert and watching.

"How is this, Maschuta? I thought that your position as spy for the Grand Duke lasted only for the summer. Has he re-engaged you?"

There was no anger in the tone. It was calm and equable and scarcely tinged with mockery.

Maschuta walked straight toward the Grand Duchess, just as if she had come to make a call upon her. She did not take the trouble to reply immediately. Catherine Alexevna admired her audacity and daring.

"Narcissus told me that you were in Gregory Orlov's rooms, when my message was delivered. Would you like him to be banished from Russia, the way your last act of spying brought about the banishment of Count Poniatovsky?"

"No, indeed, your Royal Highness. That would be inconvenient for me, because in three months Gregory Orlov is going to marry me."

Maschuta had made up her mind that her departure from Petersburg would be wise. She almost wished she had gone the night before. There was something in the heavy air of night that oppressed her like the shadow of fear.

"Men of the court, my Little Dancer, may not marry without royal permission."

"But no one can tell, your Royal Highness, who will

be the one to give out royal permission in three months from now."

This unwise rejoinder brought forth no change of expression upon the well trained face of Catherine Alexevna. But it sent defensive thoughts flying swiftly across the surface of her brain.

"Suppose I give out royal permission?"

"All things are possible!"

How she hated this woman's assurance of power, her possession of the desirable things of life!

"I suppose I could refuse, my Little Dancer — if I wished."

The words "little dancer" emphasized the breadth of the social chasm that lay between them.

"You could refuse, of course. What use would there be in holding a man's body, when you could not hold his heart?"

"Could I not?"

"You are of the great world. I am humble and of the people. But I can boast the love of the handsomest man in Russia."

Maschuta had made up her mind that she would tell Gregory Orlov the instant she reached Petersburg that she saw his advice was good and she was ready to set out for Moscow. But, in the meantime, she would revenge herself upon this woman whom she had hated long before she saw her, in those obscure days of vagabondage in Little Russia.

"He will marry me for love. He is glad to give instead of receive." Catherine Alexevna smiled deceptively.

Now was the opportunity Maschuta had longed for. Without waiting for an invitation she followed the Grand Duchess into the Porcelain Salon. How she longed

to wound this woman whom she envied, who had the things she herself desired! How she hated her assumption of superiority! Again the torrent of words was carrying her away:

"You may smile upon me scornfully, if you wish. But I do not feel your scorn. I would rather be Maschuta, the dancer, than the woman, even if she wore a crown whom the world calls —"

"Maschuta — *enough!* It will be well for you to remember to whom you are speaking."

"There are other brands of nobility, your Royal Highness, besides the one you wear. The heart, nobility of living, are titles which the world recognizes as well as yours."

"You foolish little dancer, what right have you in your ignorance to judge a woman like me? Do you not know that it is only by my forbearance that you are speaking? The more insignificant a woman is the more highly she values herself! You foolish child! And I am foolish, too, to talk to you who have not the ability to understand. I have rights which you do not have. I have the rights that ability gives and far reaching plans for my country. Peter the Regenerator gave Russia a body. I will give it a soul.

"But you do not understand! What folly it is for me to talk to you! Grief and blood went to the making of physical Russia. But only joy can go to its refining, its soul-regeneration. That is what I am for. It is joy that must be the soul of a race — and the art of a race. You foolish little dancer, there are other views of life than yours of the bargaining shopkeeper! What right have you to judge a woman like me?"

"None, perhaps! But the world has a right. And it will use it. Perhaps, your Royal Highness will respect

the world's judgment if you do not respect mine. It is not I who am speaking now, it is the world. It says that you are very little a woman,— that you are becoming a monster."

The face of Catherine Alexevna changed visibly. At last, Maschuta had struck home.

Was the world seeing the death that was going on within her? Could one not even hide one's soul? Hatred hardened her face.

" It says — the world — that Count Bestushev-Rjumin is making a monster out of you; that he is pouring his dying soul into you. In this way he will live on while you live. In this way he hopes to reign through you. In this way — The world says many things, your Royal Highness! " This, then, was the construction put upon it. This was something to hear. " His black magic will be yours. But no man will love you for yourself alone. Not even you can have everything! " added that triumphant voice that was so glad to wound.

Catherine Alexevna glanced instinctively toward the black and gold Chinese Salon. She recalled with a thrill of semi-physical intelligence how she had seen him, the night but one before, come out of the bodies of those Chinese monsters in that pallid dawn at Oranienbaum. Perhaps, he was really something terrible and incomprehensible that had lived forever; some monster that had come wandering down across the fabulous plains of the East to this chaotic land of contrasts, Russia, where anything could be. " A monster! " repeated the cruel voice, triumphantly, while her eyes blazed with the Orient's ancient hatred of the West. Catherine Alexevna was not a Slav. This Maschuta could not forgive. What right had this foreign woman in her Holy Russia? The natures of both women were primitive and elemental. But

to Catherine Alexevna there had been added the disciplined brain of Europe that could counsel, control, and that could wait until the moment came. This put an unequal weight into the scales. "A monster!" This had struck home. This had brought back sensation. She was finding that there was another emotion that checked effectively the emotionless death. It was rage. She felt it rising within her. She felt it expanding the powers of her body. She felt it flooding the inlets and recesses of her nature. She saw its dizzy swinging eddies that rose and rose. She saw its increasing depth.

Just at this moment Narcissus came ambling awkwardly across the Porcelain Salon, resplendent in red and yellow satin, which he had put on to celebrate his return to Petersburg that night, and the court. When he saw the expression upon the face of the Grand Duchess, he dropped limply down upon a sofa by the doors without any jests or capers. There was one person of whom Narcissus stood in respectful fear, and upon whom he never exercised his evil wit, and that was the Grand Duchess.

Maschuta saw her advantage and pushed it. Now, she had the upper hand. She did not interpret rightly the manner of the Grand Duchess. She was used to the anger of another class of women. She did not know how dangerous were these moments of silence. She thought they were caused by fear. Accordingly, she continued as wildly as before,

"Yes, and there are other things that you do not know, too!"

Through the rage that was filling her brain there darted the intelligence that now was coming the disclosure that Nicholas Murievich had hinted of, the secret of the Pregel.

" Perhaps you will not be so proud when you learn that you are a bastard."

Not a muscle of the face trembled despite the rage that was pounding for release within her brain.

Emboldened by relief in her victory, Maschuta continued: " Yes, a bastard! You are the natural daughter of Frederick the Great. Now, how do you feel? Now are you any better than I? "

She made no answer. Still she stood there motionless. This was it — the secret! If it were true, the disgrace was covered up in glory. Faith in herself strengthened. Courage invigorated her. Never before had she so realized her own possibilities. She was of the race of that iron-hearted warrior.

But Maschuta had no part in this quick meditation. Anger had caused her to lose temporarily the divining power of her race. She still misunderstood the silence and took it for triumph for herself.

" They call you a monster! They call you a bastard! They will call you —"

" Maschuta! " the voice had deepened and roughened. Rage was diffused over it. Such a voice from that marble woman!

Answering anger sprang up within Maschuta. She would crush that angry voice into silence. She had done it once. She would do it again. She would subdue her while she was about it.

" Yes, the people say these things — all of them. And it will not be long before they will call you something else — something worse! "

The fateful silence that followed was not broken by the tinkling of the fool's bells. Narcissus was rigid and motionless. Even his great pumpkin head was twisted into an attitude of attention.

Two candles had been placed in the far corners of the Porcelain Salon. Their flames stretched out hungrily toward the two women like pointing fingers.

" They will call you a murderess! They will call you a murderess — because you will kill the Grand Duke! "

Rage was pounding in her ears now as loudly as a sea against granite breakers. Louder and louder grew its roar, and more sense destroying. At the same time, there was a part of the brain that was active and clear and that thought with lucidity. Especially, did it recall facts of the past that bore upon the present. This heightened power of memory she was unable to shut off. She did not control it.

She heard Esterhazy remarking, sneeringly, " She will be the Tzaritza of an empire of blood and horror." Some one else — was it Marquis de l'Hôpital? Anyway, it was some foreigner whom she hated, and whose impressions of the country were sharp and clear, had declared that the air of Petersburg was electric with crime. And she remembered now just what Count Bestushev had whispered by these very sea-doors. Her brain worked like a steel spring that was polished and bright. Everything that could in anyway relate to the present it recalled distinctly. Anger had given impetus to brain and nerve centers. But not much longer could she restrain that ocean that was pounding within her. Then, there rose up within Catherine Alexevna the desire to destroy which she had first felt on the night of the ball when they had driven away from the flowers and the music to hear the wolves howl across the snow. The rage ocean could no longer be controlled. It was choking, blinding her. Then, it found an exit and its discordant roar subsided. At this moment she felt the presence of the Ghostly Chancellor just as she had felt it

when she had bidden farewell to Nicholas Murievich one morning in the dawn. Again, it seemed to her that he came from the grotesque bodies of those Chinese monsters and inhabited the adjoining black and gold salon. She glanced toward it apprehensively. There in the dim light she saw the yellow, leering face of the Great Chancellor's Calmuck slave. She recalled at once the postscript to his cipher letter, *"Do not hinder the command I have given to my Calmuck slave for to-night!"*

Now she understood. He advanced softly into the room on tip-toe, and seized Maschuta by the throat. For a few seconds the two figures swayed silently back and forth by the lighted doorway, their bodies casting distorted shadows upon the floor. Maschuta freed herself for the space of a second.

"Narcissus," she gasped, "run and tell your master to come here — *quickly*. I tried to save his life. Let him save mine! *Tell him* —"

The hands were upon her throat again. When Narcissus arose to go, two eyes of blazing anger burned a command into his brain. He dropped down limp and helpless, with foolish, staring eyes and loose hanging lips. His own petty malice and mischief were dwarfed into insignificance.

"Narcissus — for the love of God!"

The only answer was the shivering of his frightened fool's bells. Again, the two struggling figures were one and their shadows slipped along the floor. As Catherine Alexevna watched them, mindful of the Chancellor's command not to interfere, scarlet banners floated before her eyes. Faster and faster they floated, as she saw the body of Maschuta grow weak and falter. They fell to the floor. Neither moved for a little time. Then she saw that life was gone.

She was aroused from her fascinated contemplation of the dead face upon the floor by little elfin bells that tingled. Narcissus was sitting in his chair and shaking as if he had a fever, his shapeless head rolling about upon his shoulders. She looked up. The candles now stood stiff and tall, their sensitive flames white and straight above them. They held the attitude of aspiring prayer.

The Calmuck picked up the little childish body of Maschuta as lightly as if it had been a doll, ran down the terrace with it and dropped it into the Gulf. Then, he disappeared as silently as he had come. She knew that her own life had been saved by the watchful care of the Great Chancellor. Yet she felt fresh horror for the crime. And in a way she had been made a party to it. It was almost as if she had committed it. She had looked on without an effort to hinder. Narcissus with his shivering fool's bells still sat upon the sofa. She drew up a little gilt chair and sat down opposite him and looked out over the Gulf, over which the blackness of night now lay heavily.

The candles had burned considerably lower and were slipping more fretfully along the floor their ribboned light, when Gregory Orlov's handsome figure came swaying across the Chinese Salon.

"Good evening, your Royal Highness."

"Good evening, Gregory Orlov."

"Hello, Narcis! How are you?"

For answer Narcissus's teeth began to chatter like castanets and his bells to jangle madly.

"What's the matter with you, Narcis? Have you lost your wits? I never knew that vicious tongue of yours to miss an opportunity of exercise before!"

"*Narcissus,*" said the Grand Duchess, in a voice that did not brook disobedience, "*stop shaking!*"

Instantly, he was rigid, his silver fool's bells silent, looking up at her with terrified, unintelligent eyes.

"Get up! Go bring me two lighted torches. Do it at once!"

He slid awkwardly from his seat, looking up at her out of the corners of big eyes, that were as white as moons, and then shuffled away.

"I suppose that I may as well tell you now as at any time, Gregory Orlov."

"What?"

"Wait, wait! Do not be in a hurry to know. You will know soon enough. Wait until Narcissus gets back."

"It seemed a long time before Narcissus, looking both pitiful and grotesque, appeared at the sea-doors, holding painfully with his small hands two torches of pine.

"Come, Gregory."

"Light us down the terrace, Narcissus."

The shapeless little figure in its gala court suit staggered on ahead upholding one of the torches, while Orlov carried the other.

Gregory walked along wondering. When they reached the Gulf, the Grand Duchess commanded Narcissus to take hold of the end of the torch and hold it out over the water. Gregory Orlov took the heavy wood from the ineffective, trembling hands and its red light shot out over the Gulf.

"Gregory, see —"

He looked down. There, nearly at his feet, where the water was not deep and the light of his torch fell without obstruction, was the white, childish face of Maschuta.

"Who did this, Catherine Alexevna, and why?"

"No matter who did it! It is too late now to inquire.

If it had not been done, you and I would both be to-morrow night just where she is now. If she had gone back to Petersburg, the storm would have broken over our heads within twenty-four hours."

For some time in silence Gregory Orlov stood looking pityingly down at the face of the only woman he had ever loved, floating under the restless torches. Then, his own torch began to burn low and turn black, and the dark face of Maschuta faded away out of time and vision, as if it had never been.

"You drive back by yourself to Petersburg, Gregory Orlov, and I will follow. To-morrow night come to my apartments in the Winter Palace before it is time to dress for the ball."

He made silent obeisance and walked away.

At top speed he drove back to Petersburg, saying to himself: "This is the first sacrifice to the Slavic Venus! But it shall not be the last!"

He drove straight to the palace of Count Bestushev-Rjumin, the Great Chancellor. Their interview lasted until the dawn.

Later, through that damp autumn night, whose silence was interrupted by an occasional wind that had the suppressed wail of winter in its voice, Catherine Alexevna drove back to the Finnish village, accompanied only by Narcissus. She felt strangely cold that night and she wrapped herself up in a sable pelisse. Narcissus, poor little fool, was cold too, but he shivered on beside her, unnoticed, in his red and yellow satin with its tingling bells.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NIGHT OF THE BALL

The hour was half past six of the afternoon of the following day. The apartments of the Grand Duchess in the unfinished Winter Palace were open for occupancy. They consisted of a spacious sleeping room, on the right of which an archway led to a boudoir, and, beyond, a dressing room. In the upper left hand corner of the sitting room there was a bed, a square of gilded wood whose corners were upheld by statues of marble. The bed's canopy was of white and trailing ostrich plumes held together in the center by an apple of gold on top of which was the Greek cross made of diamonds. The coverlet was of white velvet upon which was embroidered in raised silk the double-headed eagle of Russia. Steps of mahogany were in front of the bed. On either end of these steps were massive vases of gold *repoussé* filled with pink roses.

A mahogany table with gilt mounts designed by Caffieri served for a washstand. Upon it rested a gold washbasin studded with cabuchon gems, the trophy of a Turkish war. The pitcher of cracked, discolored stoneware was on the floor. Court wigs were thrown carelessly on one end of the table. In the back of the room and in the center, equidistant from two small, deep set, gilt doors, stood a combination desk and table littered with books and papers.

This desk might have belonged to a scholar instead of a woman of fashion. Among the books were " Letters

of Madame de Sévigné," "Memoirs of Brantôme," Montesquieu, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, and a worn volume of Tacitus. Two small, stiff chairs, representatives of different French periods,— over one of which the sable pelisse of the night before hung like a shadow — and a small but elaborate *chaise longue,* carved perhaps by that master craftsman, Jean Goujon, completed the furnishing.

The floor was of unfinished wood. The walls were undecorated and bare. Half the ceiling was painted elaborately in the prevailing ostentatious Louis XV style, with pink cupids, flowers, and the blue ribands of Versailles. The other half was covered with a dirty canvas. One of the doors in the rear of the sleeping room was hidden beneath a Persian rug of a marvelous pink, that set one to dreaming of the roses of Shiraz. The rug was frayed and hung by one corner. There was evident a luxury that was well nigh savage, with dirt and need of the commonest articles of living.

If we might be permitted a glance outside at this hour of the day, which was that of morning, to these northern children of the night, and which was likewise that of the fashionable drive, we should see a muddy road paralleling the palace, along which were passing gilded coaches decorated in butterflies, bowknots, and amoretti. There were gorgeously painted carriages designed by foreign artists, curtained with oriental textiles, windows of Venetian glass, hung with ivory laces from Spain and Flanders. Some of these coaches contained card tables, toilet tables, and stoves made of Saxon porcelain that resembled priceless vases from old China. The famous coach of Leo Narishkin, who was a leader of fashion, was made of plate glass mirrors. The outriders were in blue and silver. Subanski, the Adonis of the Hussars, rode in an

open berlin. There were coaches colored like the rainbow; glass and silver coaches, with monograms and coats of arms upon the doors. Occasionally, too, there was an English *calêche,* a Viennese phaeton, or a wooden ox-cart from Finland, with two creaking wheels, drawn by a small pony. In winter, upon the Neva, there were sledges drawn by slim-legged reindeer. Variety was not lacking in Petersburg.

On either side of this drive there was a free space where men and women got out of their carriages and moved about for awhile. Walking was not fashionable in Petersburg. Indeed, walking elsewhere than here was only for the *moujik.* The women were conspicuous by wasp waists, flowered paniers, and trains upheld by negroes and hideous drawfs. The dwarf was as greatly in evidence in Russia as at the more ancient court of Spain.

Despite the cold, wet autumn the necks of these great ladies' dresses were cut to a low, square, décolletage. They wore cameos about their throats and wrists, and carried medallion snuff-boxes. Over the shoulder hung a curl. The hair was powdered and piled high to represent castles, ships in sail roped with gems, Chinese pagodas, or baskets filled with flowers. Sometimes, a coiffeur exceeded a foot and a half in height. Their rouged and powdered cheeks were decorated with *assasins.* Some were accompanied by pages in dazzling livery whose duty it was to carry the long pearl-handled parasols which were useless. To contrast with the trains, the skirts in front were cut short in order to show the latest Parisian fad in footwear — shoes *à la belle poule.* These excesses in fashion were suited to this land of excess in living where they were displayed. Indeed, these extravagances were specially designed in Paris for the Court

of Russia and the prices attached to them were fabulous. The men wore velvet coats, satin waistcoats, knee breaches of soft leather or silk, and sometimes *bottes fortes*. They carried muffs of priceless fur to protect their delicate hands.

In the distance there were rows of dilapidated huts and the cold waters of the Neva, which, at this period, was not protected by granite quais. Along the streets were heaps of evil smelling refuse where mangy dogs played and fought. From time to time the procession of carriages was interrupted by a slow moving ox-cart from the Ukraine driven by a peasant in pointed sheep wool cap, or an ancient family carryall from the southern provinces, a padded coachman on the seat.

Petersburg, at this time, was not a large place. It had been built hastily by a race who had to learn to like a fixed place of residence. The primeval swamp had been made over in a trice into a semi-civilized place of living by the brutal will of the Great Peter, with no consideration for comfort or for human life, because this was the point where he could come nearest to Europe. Nature did not intend that a city should be built here, on this cold, unfriendly, mist-covered plain where the pale cranberries grew and the faded mosses. It was meant merely to prelude the desolation of an Arctic water. And at this time there were only about one hundred thousand inhabitants. The houses were of wood. The streets, which were either dusty or muddy, had neither pavements nor sidewalks. They were infested by hungry dogs that sometimes attacked people on foot. It bore almost no resemblance, architecturally, to a Russian city. It recalled a Finnish village. At night parts of the city were still barricaded like the turbulent ducal towns of old Tuscany, and it was unsafe to walk alone, unarmed.

Only the lowest classes were seen on foot upon the street, except at this hour of fashionable promenade along the Nevsky Prospect. And at this hour it was not uncommon to see a man lying upon the walk covered with blood and dying.

It was now that the royal gardens were made open to the people. But her Majesty added to the generous proclamation, "to well dressed people only." Never was such store set by good clothes as by Elizabeth Petrovna and her court. It was her intention to civilize, externally at least, her Asian province. Petersburg, notwithstanding, was a sad and dismal city. Who could calculate the amount of blood and suffering that had gone to its making! Poor and humble workmen had been taken from all the provinces of the nation for this purpose — Tartars, Cossacks, Finns. They had not had sufficient food or clothes. They had had few tools with which to work. They took off their coats and shirts and used them to carry the dirt which filled up this Finnish marsh. They were not sheltered from the cold of winter, or the rain, or the heat of summer. They were not cared for in any way. The first year one hundred thousand men died, as many as the inhabitants of Petersburg at this time. The suffering of those who survived was so great that it was reported that a statue of the Virgin wept. Such was this newborn capital of an empire in the middle of the Great Century.

Mafra Savischna, in regulation peasant costume, had just entered the bed chamber of the Grand Duchess, carrying a black domino, a petticoat, a mask and a hood. She threw the domino and the petticoat over the foot of the great bed, and hung the mask strings and the hood over an arm of one of the marble statues. She was not

in an amiable mood. She had no liking for her sphinx-like mistress whom she could not cajole.

"I wonder why the Grand Duke is so crazy to know what she is going to wear to-night? Well, it is not this black cotton domino — I know. She's having me bring this in for a blind. I know her! When she says she is going south, I am always pretty certain that she is going north. So she isn't quite so clever as she thinks she is."

She sat down and began to dress one of the wigs.

"There's something up to-night — something out of the ordinary. The palm of my left hand has itched all day. I never knew that sign to fail! Everyone in the palace is excited. I never saw such goings on. I wonder what it is. It would not do the Grand Duke any good to know what she is going to wear. I should say not! Nothing can do him any good. Poor fool!

"I wonder why all the Grand Duke's friends are so crazy to know what she is going to wear to-night, too! I just sent word to him that she had ordered a black domino brought to her room. One of his Prussian friends gave me a ruble for the information. It must be important. I wonder if she is really going to disguise herself this way to-night? Nobody can tell why she does anything."

The Grand Duchess, wearing a white silk petticoat of the latest Parisian cut and stays, entered the room. Her arms and shoulders were bare. Her unbound hair fell almost to her knees. In this deshabille there was evident that distinguishing characteristic of women of birth of the Eighteenth Century — extreme slenderness combined with strength. The expression of her face was

cold and controlled. One noticed that the lips looked thinner and less red. She was followed by Dsiemba, her Calmuck slave, who carried a pink *saut de lit,* two books, and a bronze mirror. She lay down upon the day-bed in order that Mafra Savischna might brush her hair. Upon the face of her maid there was an expression of malice mixed with fear.

"Throw the *saut de lit* over the end there," she commanded, indicating the foot of the day-bed.

"Now give me my mirror and Montesquieu. No,—the other book! The one in brown and gold! Are you color blind, Dsiemba? Put the other on the floor where I can reach it. Now take off my slippers."

He took off the gilt slippers. She wore stockings of coarse, openwork design, upon the insteps of which were embroidered the arms of Russia. The Grand Duchess at this time was famous throughout Europe for the beauty of her feet.

"Now, go. Mafra Savischna, are my wigs in order?"

"They are, Little Mother."

"Very well. Braid my hair in two braids and fasten it smoothly about my head."

She alternately read, examined herself critically in the mirror, and looked straight ahead gloomily and meditatively without seeming to see anything.

"The Little Mother's hair is very beautiful," murmured Mafra Savischna, eager for conversation.

"How it would hold up a crown, now would it not, Little Mother?"

"It takes something more than hair to hold up a crown, Mafra Savischna!"

"Lift up your mirror, Little Mother, a little, just a little — and see! Now am I not right?"

"Why do you chatter so, Mafra Savischna? Be still."

After a pause which weighed heavily upon her, Mafra Savischna returned bravely to her questioning.

"What will your friend, the Princess Dashkov, wear to-night — to the masked ball, Little Mother?"

The Grand Duchess shook her head and refused to answer.

"You do not know? Why is that, Little Mother?"

Again the Grand Duchess shook her head.

"And you — what are you going to wear?"

The question was evidently lost upon ears that did not hear.

"And her sister, Elizabeth Woronzov, what will she wear?"

A somewhat prolonged pause followed this, while she fastened up the long braids of hair.

"She has fine hair, too."

"Do you think that it would hold up a crown as well as mine, Mafra Savischna?"

"What — Little Mother?" stammered Mafra Savischna, greatly confused.

"I say, do you think that it would hold up a crown as well as mine?"

"Of course not! Of course not, Little Mother! Who could think such a thing? Not I! The saints forbid!"

"Why can you not keep still a minute, Mafra Savischna?"

She turned to her reading and a pause followed, while the maid put the last touches to her hair.

"Now, look, Little Mother! Does it please you? I am your devoted slave, Little Mother. I wish always to please you!"

The Grand Duchess lifted the mirror and looked at it indifferently.

"Yes, yes. That will do. That will do!"

As she put down the bronze mirror, Gregory Orlov came in hurriedly and excitedly, flinging aside the Persian rug across the door. Upon his face there was no trace of the grief and anger of the night before. He had borrowed the courtier's weapon — a smiling face. But in his heart he was none the less determined upon revenge. And that revenge should help his future. If he had a right to risk his own interests, he had no right to risk his brothers'.

Loneliness of a kind he had not felt before had come upon him, and he felt dimly that it would not lift at once. The sensuous face looked harder and more self-controlled. The tenderness of youth was less evident. He was beginning to feel that death of the heart which the passion for power brings.

But he was looking particularly handsome even for him. To-night he resembled more a Greek of the Classic Age than an Eighteenth Century Russian. He was wearing the conventional court dress. An Asiatic touch, however, was given to his appearance by the great blue gems dangling from his ears. From a buttonhole hung an ivory miniature of the Grand Duchess, concealed from observation by a blue and heart shaped diamond which was one of the fabulous treasures of Russia.

"Catherine Alexevna, are you dreaming over a book — and now!" he exclaimed as he entered, quite in his old voice, just as if nothing had happened. He made a mock gesture of salute to her monogrammed ankles.

"This is what the world will be doing soon."

The Grand Duchess yawned indifferently and closed the book, keeping one finger in it.

"Do you not think that the head is a better place for a crown than the feet, Gregory Orlov?"

"Why will you insist upon talking nonsense?"

The Grand Duchess yawned again.

"What difference does it make what one talks? All things are nonsense — more or less."

"But you insist upon not understanding — not caring."

"I do not. You said in compliment what the world says: that my feet, because they are beautiful, become a crown better than my head."

"I said nothing of the kind."

"How impatient you are, Gregory Orlov! What folly it is to dispute!"

"Is it not greater folly to be dreaming over a book as I find you and forget your responsibilities, especially *now when —*"

The Grand Duchess interrupted him, impatiently.

"Do not be cross, Gregory. It is not worth while, when I see you so seldom."

"It is your own fault that you do not see me. You are busy. You do not wish to be disturbed."

She took her fingers reluctantly out of the book and closed it.

"What are you reading, Catherine Alexevna?"

"Montesquieu. *'Esprit des Lois.'*"

"A wise thing to be doing — at this crisis."

"I am taking your advice."

"Yes, yes — I see. This is the way you always take it."

"When you saluted that crown there — upon my ankle — did you not say that all the world would be doing it soon? That is why I read Montesquieu. He is a writer for sovereigns."

"What is this, Catherine Alexevna?" picking up a book from the floor. "Beaumarchais?"

"Yes; a charming book. I should like to commend that book to Alexander. He would appreciate it."

"Let him! I do not envy him. I would rather be a live Orlov now than a dead emperor. However, my dear Duchess, if you persist in devoting too much time to him you may have an opportunity to die and commend that book to Alexander somewhat sooner than you may wish. Unexpected death may befall the great as well as the obscure," he said, with an intonation meant only for her ears, which aroused unpleasant memories. "Books! Stuff and nonsense! Proper things to talk of now, are they not? Have you no sense of the importance of the present? Do you not know — or are you just acting for your pleasure and my discomfort — do you not know the fate of —"

The Grand Duchess interrupted him hurriedly, looking narrowly toward Mafra Savischna.

"What do I care for the fate of anything?"

"I have noticed that your Highness had an unique forgetfulness in that respect."

She took no notice of the insinuation.

"I, Gregory Orlov, would rather be a pretty woman than anything in the world. I would rather have one moment of love than a century of immortality."

"These fine ideas of yours, Catherine Alexevna, are the fault of those French philosophers. I do not know anything about books — thank God! And I have noticed that people who do are queer. But I do know that they have given you new and unwise notions. Since Voltaire — a curse upon his soul — wrote you, 'My heart is a magnet that turns toward the north,' you have thought of nothing else. What are book-men good for any-

way? They are simply nothing, nothing at all, in comparison with a man of action. A pack of old women — that is what they are! Bah! I detest them. Bookmen are cowards. They live with their brains, because they do not dare to live with their bodies."

"Of course, Gregory! No philosopher would be foolish enough to follow his own teachings, any more than a doctor would take his own medicine. They would both rather be miserable according to somebody else's prescription. Philosophy is a mental toy made to play with, not to live by. No philosopher takes himself seriously. He lets other people do that."

"What is a philosopher anyway?"

"A blind man who offers to a dim world the light of his tallow candle!"

"This is not play, your Royal Highness."

"You are unreasonable, hasty, in your judgments, Orlov — always. Why should you take it into your head that bread must be cake in a minute, because you wish it? Why can you not consider distinctions, differences — value each according to his kind?"

"I am not going to waste time in arguing with your Royal Highness. The Empress may not live two days. Then, when the Grand Duke puts you aside and marries Elizabeth Woronzov, Voltaire will find that there is another — and a stronger — magnet in the north."

"Hush! Hush! What nonsense you talk! I repeat what I said to you,— learn to value each person according to his kind. Do as I do! Now for pleasure I read French philosophers — and your friend Voltaire. For conversation I prefer a diplomat or a witty courtier. But for love an officer of the guards will do — if he happens to look like you," glancing up at the handsome figure to whose charm no woman could be indifferent.

"That is what the world says, your Royal Highness."

"What world?"

"Petersburg, Versailles, Berlin, Dresden, Vienna! What other world is there?"

"Well, what does it say, Orlov?"

"That to you a dog, a lover, a poet and a hero are all one."

The Grand Duchess laughed.

"That is a compliment, Gregory Orlov! They mean, I suppose, that I am the best judge in the world of each. You are proof of it! You are the handsomest man in Russia."

"Do you suppose that that is what I came here to hear, Catherine Alexevna?"

"You do not usually come to *hear* anything, Gregory."

"I will ignore that insinuation also. Answer me this. Do you know what night to-night is, Catherine Alexenva?"

"Of course I do! It is the night of the masked ball — and the tableaux."

"Can it be that you do not know? To-night the fate of Europe hangs in the balance! *To-night —*"

She interrupted him sharply and in a voice in which there was a trace of fear. For greater caution she spoke in French.

"Hush! Hush — *Gregoire!*"

Gregory Orlov took the cue and replied in French. At this period the court language of Petersburg was a mixture of French and German interspersed with occasional Russian words.

"Can you not count upon this maid of yours?"

"I do not think so, Gregoire. She is a spy. I am sure of it! She is in the pay of the Grand Duke and the Woronzov." After a pause, she continued, "I have it

now!" Going to the desk she wrote and folded a note.

"Mafra Savischna, take this to Princess Dashkov. Wait for an answer. Tell Dsiemba, my Calmuck, to wait for my commands outside the door."

Mafra Savischna departed regretfully.

"Now I suppose I may be permitted to speak with you, Catherine Alexevna, and perhaps have an answer in reply. Do you not realize that to-night is one of the great nights in the history of Europe? Do you not realize that to-night this little hand of yours holds the future of the western world? And you sit here not caring, dreaming over a book, and letting the precious hours slip by!"

Catherine Alexevna looked down at the little hand.

"Do you not remember, Catherine Alexevna," continued Gregory Orlov, inspired by her indifference and inattention, in his enthusiasm pacing about the chamber, "do you not remember how the battles of the Greeks kept the hordes of Persia from overrunning Europe? To-night decides whether Russia, which rose like the dream of an Indian magician at the word of the Regenerator, makes Petersburg the ruling city or goes back again to its sleep by the Syrian deserts. To-night will be fought the last battle between the tools of Frederick the Great and Count Bestushev-Rjumin, our Russian Richelieu. And you will be the battle ground!" Catherine Alexevna put aside her air of indifference. She stuck her feet into her slippers and jumped up, throwing the *saut de lit* about her, "What, is there something new — tell me!"

"It is time your Royal Highness showed interest. You know how long it has been the dream of the Prussian King to dominate the north, to be the one power, make Berlin the one city! For this he has worked and plotted. He knew that there was only one way to realize that

dream, and that was to get the upper hand of Russia, to make her give up her northern capital Petersburg, to go back to Moscow or Kiev. In Russia he recognized his greatest obstacle. How many times in these years has he thought to conquer! When our blessed Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna, came to the throne he exclaimed, 'Relying upon the Sybaritic nature of the new Empress, I think — *I hope* — that when the court moves to Moscow for the coronation it will lose sight of Europe and Petersburg.' How greatly was he disappointed! He found out that he had a new foe. The Empress was dominated by Count Bestushev-Rjumin, our Great Chancellor. For a quarter of a century Frederick of Prussia's plans — and those of the rest of Europe for that matter — have been checked by him. Has it not been thrilling, Catherine Alexevna, this diplomatic battle that has lasted throughout the years? It goes back to my childhood. I heard it from my father. We have been the stage, and Europe the interested audience. The victories, they have been many, and often on our side. It has been thrilling to watch! I can remember now just how my father's voice used to tremble with pride when he told us children of the Ghostly Chancellor.

"Old Count Bestushev has fought and ruined Tscherkassov. He put down that fool of fortune, Biron. He tricked that trickster La Chetardie. And he has had enemies in his own family, too, who envied him and helped play him into hands that would destroy him! His own brother worked against him. He met betrayal on every side. But he did not give up. Now he is disposing of l'Hôpital and the subtle Esterhazy. The two cannot match him! Think, Catherine Alexevna, for fifteen years Petersburg has been Europe's field of diplomacy. Here, diplomats won their spurs. If accredited

and successful, there was nothing more to be desired. We have seen the best that training can produce. From France we have had La Chetardie, l'Hôpital, Segur, de Broglie; from Prussia, Baron Mardefeld — not to mention others. And all sent for one purpose — to work the downfall of the Great Chancellor. To see him now one would say that it was really a ghost fighting with the living, a phantom whom some unexplained force makes intermittently visible.

"And what has he done with them, Catherine Alexevna? What has he done with them — these enemies of his? Brushed them aside lightly and easily! Splendid! Splendid! Ah! — it has been interesting to watch — this duel of the two ablest men in Europe! And one is a man of the people. And one is the most arrogant of kings. Splendid! Splendid!

"How they have fought! How they have plotted! How they have schemed! How they have watched for an unprotected place! With each, death meant not merely annihilation of self, but the annihilation of a kingdom."

"And now, Orlov?"

"Her Majesty is at death's door. *Now* the last round — the most perilous round — of the duel is at hand. Now, if the fall of the Ghostly Chancellor can be accomplished to-night, and you gained for Prussia, the Prussian king has won his point. New Russia will be no more."

"But the Grand Duke?"

"He is Prussian to the core. You know he is! He cannot even speak the Russian language. It was he who sent the plans of our army to Prussia in the present war."

Gregory Orlov was well informed, she thought. But it was her habit to receive information, not to give it.

"To-night, Catherine Alexevna, the Prussian king is in the sorest of straits. This you have not heard. Our arms are again victorious. They only await the orders of Count Bestushev-Rjumin to-night to storm Berlin. A special detachment of Cossacks and Croatians under General Panin are awaiting that order now. When that order comes — it will be to-night, if the Russian party at court wins the upper hand — they are going to demand one hundred thousand rubles to feast our soldiers.

"Think what that means to Berlin! The city is poor. The war has exhausted it. It is all the Prussians can do to feed their army. Already Suvarov has been made governor of Königsberg. They are going to prepare a Russian law system for the city and set up a mint. The wily Frederick cannot fight the allied powers. He knows it. He knows likewise that it is Russia that will turn the balance for defeat or victory. He knows that the destruction of his dynasty is at stake, his home, his country. Defeat means ruin."

"Go on, go on, Orlov —"

"If he can gain a little time, Catherine Alexevna, until her Majesty dies, it is agreed that if the Grand Duke Peter rule, only for one day, that day he will depose the Great Chancellor. Then, if he can gain you — he knows as do we all that the Grand Duke cannot reign — he is saved, is he not?"

"And to-night, Orlov?"

"To-night Petersburg is filled with the spies and the secret messengers of Prussia. To-night Frederick the Great will offer the half of his kingdom in coined gold to you and to Count Bestushev to call off the besieging army. On my way to the palace I have been offered a duchy. To-night there is no one who will not be approached."

"Just now you heard this, Orlov?"

"Yes. But court intrigues grow like mushrooms. Who can tell what has happened since I came? And here is another point you must take under consideration. If Frederick the Great could keep the Grand Duke, your husband, upon the throne, since he is feeble of mind and will and devoted to him, he would rule Russia. Then — now listen, Catherine Alexevna — then, in case he cannot gain you and still fears you —"

"Then he would cause me to be put aside for Elizabeth Woronzov. She could be amused with gems of which she is greedy and —"

"Then, Catherine Alexevna, you would disappear. You would not be seen again. Then, there would happen one of those mysterious deaths of Russia. Try to realize this! Try to realize the danger!

"But Frederick the Great has one more card to play before he attempts anything so serious, one card which he thinks will win. It is something held in abeyance for years for a crisis like this."

Catherine Alexevna, with the duplicity which the training of years had given, did not disclose the information which she had had from Maschuta. Nor did Gregory Orlov disclose the information which he had had from the same source. He was counting upon the surprise when it was told her by the spies at some critical moment later in the night.

"The wily Frederick is playing as usual a double game. He will offer to the Grand Duke and to myself, each separately, his support in obtaining the crown. Then he will plot to destroy the one who refuses his conditions, or who promises to be least useful to his plans.

A knock was heard at the door.

"Come," commanded the Grand Duchess.

Dsiemba, the Calmuck slave, entered.

" Your Royal Highness, a messenger waits from Count Bestushev-Rjumin."

" Bring him in."

The messenger entered and gave her a sealed letter.

" Dsiemba, the candles."

Dsiemba brought in the candles which he lighted after placing two at the foot of the great bed, two at the head of the day-bed, and one on either side of the desk. By their light she read the letter and then destroyed it.

" Tell Count Bestushev-Rjumin that I read and obey."

Dsiemba and the messenger made obeisance and left the room.

" Is the letter important? " queried Orlov, who knew that it was from Count Bestushev.

" He commands me to disguise myself in the uniform of the Preobrashensky regiment and go to Muhr's Coffee House on the Morskoi, and remain there until after the masking at the ball is over. There, I shall find the Grand Duke, Prussian and French spies, and Elizabeth Woronzov and Countess Bruce, disguised as men. He says that it is necessary that I myself hear what they say."

" Go! Dress at once."

" But how can I? "

" Why not? "

" The ball! I am commanded to be there by her Majesty. Besides I am in disfavor. I should not dare disobey."

" Luckily, Catherine Alexevna, the first part is a masked ball. That helps you out of the difficulty. Someone can take your place until the masking is over."

" But who? "

" Who can you trust? "

" That is just it! Who can I? "

"The Empress would not forgive disobedience. I suppose it has leaked out — everything does at court — that I am to wear a black domino."

"Whoever takes your place will learn dangerous secrets. And to-night of all nights! It must be someone who is devoted to you."

"I cannot announce that it is not I!"

"Your double will learn dangerous secrets."

"Of course!"

"There will be no way to safeguard your friends. They need to be protected as well as yourself. They would be imprisoned."

"That is just it."

"You must have a double whom you can trust."

"Yes, yes!"

"Ah! — I have it!"

"Who?"

"Nicholas Murievich."

The Grand Duchess became silent. Something snapped the chain of her thoughts. For the instant she became an automaton. But upon her face there was no trace of the effect of his words. He stood scrutinizing her with eager eyes. But even he who knew her well could read nothing upon that mask of marble. Slowly, destructively, an idea burrowed its way through her brain. It moved in many a crossed and zigzag line, just as a worm burrows through the heart of an apple. She understood now the command to procure a black domino and one some sizes too large. She linked fact with fact with nimble precision. She saw what was coming. And it had come so swiftly, so unexpectedly, that she was powerless to avert it. The plot was so compounded that to fight against it meant the destruction of herself. Plainly stated, it meant a choice between her own life and the life of Nicholas Murievich.

What ironical justice that the news should be brought by Gregory! But it was not Gregory who was behind it. It was the Great Chancellor. Only he could so imitate the blind cruelty of Fate. She felt no anger toward either of them. They had merely checkmated her in the game which is life, at a point where she thought she was protected and, therefore, not looking. She had been outplayed. But she did not mean to yield. She would save him. She would outplay them in the end. And they should not know that she had understood. She would not show anger or any opposition. That would mean death to him. And if she did avert the blow to-night, he should leave Russia at dawn, guided across the border by trusty servants of her own, and put out of the way of danger. How she regretted that she had importuned him to return to Russia!

But she would save him! She would save him by apparently acquiescing. She would impress upon him that he must not leave the ball room of the Winter Palace until she returned at the time of unmasking. Then, there would be no danger. She understood that the plan was to lure him away. All this she had thought rapidly.

"Is he not the one, your Highness?" persisted Orlov. "He has mimicked you for the amusement of your friends. When he wishes, he can be your other self."

"I am not so sure, Orlov, that he is the one. Do you really think so?"

"Well, then, think of someone else! Is there anyone else whom you can trust with secrets whose disclosure would cost your life?"

Ah! — he had said it, Orlov! It was her life against his! That was a diplomatic error on his part. He should not have said that.

Silence fell between them heavy and ominous. The

eyes of the Grand Duchess were riveted upon the brutal gold of the Turkish washbasin which was the trophy of bloody wars. The candles had found there the hearts of sullen rubies that hid their secrets from the day, just as skilfully as she did. As she looked at the Turkish trophy, she thought how everything in Russia — even life — must be the prize of battle.

The face of Orlov was white and determined. She paused to criticize him in her thoughts for fighting too openly for revenge. Her mind was a diamond of multiple facets that reflected each slightest shadow of thought.

"Are you not going to be game, Catherine Alexevna?"

There was no answer. There was no change of expression upon the impassive face. She was thinking of that pitiful letter of the morning before and its trusting love. She was thinking, too, of that other letter from the banks of the Pregel with its premonition of death if he returned. She recalled the night at Oranienbaum when he left her in the dawn, telling her that his life depended upon her, that she must not falter. But who could have foreseen a combination like this! A combination that placed her life, and Russia, in the balance against his! There was just one man who could foresee such things and put them into execution. That was Count Bestushev. But she did not feel anger toward him nor Orlov. It was merely a clever play in a game. She admired its cleverness. She would have admired it just the same if it had cost her own life. Her nature had become so complex that it responded to many and varied emotions at the same time. Perhaps, she would have sacrificed her own life.

But she could not sacrifice Russia! The cunning fox had calculated upon just this. Her devotion to Russia was great as his own. His love for her was dependent

upon this. She walked across to the desk, wrote a note and called Dsiemba.

" Dsiemba, send this by Kusma to Nicholas Murievich. Tell him to answer in person. Then, take my uniform of the Preobrashensky regiment into my dressing room off the boudoir."

" Shall I go with you to Muhr's on the Morskoi? " asked Orlov, as indifferently as if no discussion had taken place between them. She was grateful to him for not showing the triumph of a person who has won.

" No; go on to the ball. In the intermission, or whenever you can slip away, join me at Muhr's and we will return to the palace together."

" Are you going as you are? "

" Yes, with exception of an eye-mask. To-night I cannot afford the danger of disguise."

Dsiemba knocked and was admitted.

" The order of your Royal Highness has been obeyed."

Dsiemba returned to his place of duty outside the door.

" I will be back in a few moments," said the Grand Duchess, starting toward her boudoir to put on the soldier's suit.

" Have you a *fidibus?* " called Orlov, as she neared the archway of the boudoir.

" Yes; somewhere there. On my study table, I think," disappearing through the door.

Orlov walked across to the desk where he found a package of the small cigarette shaped Eighteenth Century cigars then in vogue. He lighted one from a candle at the foot of the bed and walked up and down the room smoking.

" She took it coolly! With little or no resistance. Does that mean that she does not care or that she yields? Or does it mean that she is reserving her energy for a

struggle? Or does it mean that she will outwit us without apparent effort?

"What a night this will be for me! It will permit me to perform the last service for Maschuta — revenge. And, if things go well, it will find me a humble officer of the guards, and leave me on the threshold of the throne. If Prussia loses, and the Empress Elizabeth dies — as soon she must — the Grand Duke will seek immortality in the only way that he, poor fool, will find it — death. That has been an ancient and well established glory for unpopular rulers of Russia. To procure glory by dying is a good way. It precludes the disillusioning element of change. Catherine Alexevna will reign. And then — *and then* — when Murievich is safely out of the way! This time he will have the honor of preceding a Grand Duke to the fields of glory. And then — *and then* — I have looked fortune bravely in the eye — and she has favored me.

"It is good for me — but then all things have been good for me! — that in Holy Russia it is not necessary to have been born to the purple. Here one may be anything. It is only the present that counts. Each has an opportunity. Brain and nerve determine events — and when women rule — beauty."

"Gregory! Gregory!" called the Grand Duchess from her boudoir.

The clear merriment of the voice displeased him. If he were to die to-night, would she care as little?

"You will not know me! But you never saw anything so becoming!"

She came into the chamber wearing the uniform of the Preobrashensky regiment. She had on a black, curling wig. Her skin was darkened to harmonize with her hair. She bowed, laughing, and took off her cap.

" Semen Savelish, at your service, Sir, from near Jassy, in Little Russia."

" By the body of holy Isaac! They will really think you are a Little Russian. What if they should put it to the test? What if they should ask you to dance the stork dance?"

" Do you think that I could not — or that I could not speak their dialect? I would dance it this way."

She placed her arms akimbo, tilted over her cap, and began the dance, singing the song that accompanied it,

" Oh! the eagles have put the doves to flight! "

Dsiemba entered and announced Nicholas Murievich.

She paused in her dancing.

" Good evening, Orlov. The Grand Duchess sent for me. Is she not here? "

For the space of a second the two men stood side by side presenting an interesting contrast.

" She just went into her dressing room, Murievich. She wished you to see this Little Russian — a protégé of hers — dance the stork dance."

" Come,— begin again! "

This time Orlov sang the song while the Grand Duchess danced. When she had finished, she turned to him laughing.

" I fooled you, did I not? "

" Is it you? Is it possible, Catherine Alexevna? "

" If I can fool you, I can fool anyone! Now that is just what I sent to you for! I wish you to fool me! "

" That is it, Murievich."

" I do not understand," stammered Nicholas Murievich.

" I mean just what I say. I wish you to be me to-night."

" Be serious, your Highness! What is it that you wish? "

" Count Bestushev has commanded me to put on this disguise and go to Muhr's on the Morskoi. It is imperative. It is likewise imperative that I go to the ball. It is the command of her Majesty. I represent her to-night. Now I cannot be two persons, can I, at one and the same time? What shall I do? This: You will have to be my other self."

" There is no other way out of it, Murievich," broke in Orlov. " You are the only one who can do it."

" Besides, Nicholas Murievich, I am in displeasure with her Majesty. I dare not disobey. It would be ruinous. I will return in court dress for the unmasking, when the ladies change costumes. No one will be the wiser save you and I, and Orlov here — and Count Bestushev."

He became attentive at name of the Great Chancellor.

" Whatever Count Bestushev commands, you must do. He has your welfare at heart. That is the thing to be considered."

She saw again the nobility of his nature.

" But, Nicholas Murievich, you must promise me one thing — solemnly — before you go. If you do not, you shall not go. You must promise me not to leave the ballroom of the Winter Palace under any consideration whatsoever."

" But why this earnestness? "

" It is important! I cannot tell you why now. But if you keep the promise, all will be well. No matter what the pretext may be, do not go outside the palace. I will tell Dsiemba to wait for you in the corridor to the right of the ballroom. When the order for unmasking comes, if I have not returned, you go to him. He will take you to a dressing room to which your court suit will be brought."

" Of course, I promise, if it pleases you," he replied, in

the dull voice of one who yields to a caprice. "But your disguise, can I wear it?"

"Of course! Here it is."

"Is it not fortunate she chose a domino, Murievich?"

"Is it known that your Royal Highness is to wear this to-night? If it is, it will make it harder for me."

"Very likely it is known. But I have tried to keep it secret."

"But what secret was ever kept at court?" questioned Orlov, insolently.

"The Grand Duke may know it, Nicholas Murievich. Mafra Savischna may have told him."

"If the Grand Duke knows it, Murievich, other people know it. His way of keeping a secret is to give it over to the keeping of his friends."

"Where is Mafra Savischna?" asked Nicholas Murievich, looking about.

"Out of the way for once!" exclaimed Orlov.

"I sent her with a note to Princess Dashkov. She will understand what that means and have her locked up for to-night. So you see no one but you two and Count Bestushev will know that I am at Muhr's. The Dashkov will be ravishing to-night in her fancy dress."

"What is it?" questioned the two in concert.

"A Moldavian peasant's gala costume. By the way, Nicholas Murievich, if you have an opportunity, you tell her as soon as you can where I am. I count upon her! Come, Gregory, let us dress Nicholas Murievich," the pleasure audible in her voice of his given promise not to leave the ballroom.

"Off with your wig! Gregory, bring the black petticoat that goes under the domino."

They pulled it over his head and the Grand Duchess fastened it in the back and pulled it down into place.

"Wait! Wait!" commanded Nicholas Murievich, waving them away, while he picked up one of the Grand Duchess's wigs from the washstand and her sable pelisse and put them on.

"Now permit me to give you an imitation of the Grand Duchess of Russia! Now this is the way the Grand Duchess walks when she goes to confess to the very saintly Feodor Jakovlevitch Dubjansky. Demurely. Modestly. Her eyes upon her shoes. *So! So!* The Grand Duchess is devout. She does not neglect her religious duties.

"This is the way the Grand Duchess walks when she goes to give an unwelcome account of adventures to her Majesty. With dignity and an air of aggrieved innocence."

The Grand Duchess laughed merrily and a happy light came into her eyes.

"Enough! Enough!" she called, jestingly. "You shall not mimic me like this."

"Famos! Famos!" declared Orlov, ready as ever to be amused.

"But this is the way the Grand Duchess walks when at night she goes to the house of Leo Narishkin in a gay disguise to meet our Slavic Apollo. Boldly. With her head in the air. *So! So!"*

"Enough! Enough! I will stand no more."

"Famos! Famos!" reiterated Orlov.

"Now, Gregory, you bring the domino." They put it on. "Now the mask," called the Grand Duchess, taking it from the marble statue.

"And the hood."

"No one would ever know you, Murievich!"

"Never in the world!"

"Is there anything else to put on? Or is this all?"

"Yes, yes! These black gloves. And under them my signet ring to be used in case of need. This will prove that you really are the Grand Duchess of Russia. Now you must go. The time is up. But remember your promise! Do not leave the ballroom of the Winter Palace until I return. *Remember!* God be with you!"

"Be all ears, good friend Murievich!" called out Orlov. "The saints protect you!"

After the door had closed, Catherine Alexevna and Gregory Orlov avoided each other's eyes. She broke the silence, "Give me a *fidibus,* Gregory."

He held out the case. She took one and lighted it from a candle and walked about the room.

"You ought to be going, too, Gregory. You cannot afford to be absent when the ball opens. Join me at Muhr's in the intermission, anyway! And before, if you can get off."

"There may be a rough crowd at Muhr's to-night, *m'Amie.* Be careful!"

"No one would know me in this disguise. Besides, I have my sword."

"Then *au revoir,*" he called, as his handsome figure disappeared beneath the Persian curtain.

"*Au revoir, Gregoire!*" she answered, but without looking up at him, waving her cigarette.

No sooner was she alone than her expression changed to one of worry and annoyance. She smoked on gloomily. Phantoms of fear chased themselves across her brain.

"Life seems to demand of me murder after murder. And it demands it in such a way that the alternative is my own life."

"Yes," she said aloud, in a changed voice, "they forced my hand cleverly, Orlov and Count Bestushev. I acquiesced. That was the only way to save him. But I will

checkmate them yet, if he obeys me. And to-morrow Nicholas Murievich shall leave Russia and not return until I am in power. Will it ever be over — the suspense, the dissimulation, the making believe that I am indifferent when I am often worn with anxiety? But it is best! Results prove it. My friends think that it is, they who are doing it, they who are pushing me to the throne. If they knew I was ambitious, they would fear me and cease. All but Orlov! His fortune is bound up with mine. Self-interest would keep him true."

She called Dsiemba and sent him to find out if the Grand Duke and Elizabeth Woronzov had left the palace. He brought word that they were still in their apartments.

"It is not time for me to go there then," she thought. "I must not reach Muhr's until they have been in the house some time and are busy amusing themselves."

She threw away the cigarette and walked restlessly about the room.

"I wonder if to-night will end it? It will be a change to face," she said to herself, with slow conviction.

She consulted her watch. Time moved slowly. She picked up and then threw down three books upon her desk. She could not concentrate her mind sufficiently to read. The present was not pleasant to consider. In its place memories of the past swept through her brain in that hour of anxiety, while she paced her chamber in solitude and waited for Dsiemba to come to tell her that the others had started for the Coffee House on the Morskoi.

She recalled sharply, without effort of direction on her own part, perhaps because it was the point of parting forever from the past, how she used to dream in childhood of that unknown Slavic land whose people lived amid gold. She remembered well that first glimpse of awful Russia. It was at Riga. She could not forget that. She

had just come through the silent pine forests of Lithuania. It was winter. When the sleigh emerged from the black trees, on all sides the snow fields spread with the imposing, glittering splendor of a Polar ocean. Next came Petersburg. Here, they paused just long enough for the horses to be changed. Then, on again the long sleigh journey went for days and days, across interminable whitenesses, to the heart of old Russia, to Holy Moscow, where the court was. She recalled, as if it had been but yesterday, the great country houses along the way, the nights of feasting, the wild revelry. Men with bearded faces looked across the wine cups. They wore flashing gems in their ears.

By night flaming pine trees lighted the way. The luxurious sledges were covered with ermine and gold brocade. This reasonless luxury had made her think that it was all a dream. She aroused herself from her picture revery sufficiently to realize sharply that perhaps she had never awakened from that dream. It had stupefied her.

It was at Riga that she received the first present from her Russian Majesty: a cloak and boots of sable, lined with cloth of gold. There were twenty or thirty sleighs in the cortège then. When they approached Moscow, they stopped long enough to put on court dress for presentation to her Majesty. When again the sleighs went on, there were sixteen horses attached to each sleigh. Out across the snow they could hear the wolves howling — always howling across the snow. Death waited on the horizon. That made it Russia.

A late spring came after that first Russian winter. She recalled how she accompanied the Empress on the annual pilgrimage to the Troitsko Sergius Cloister to pray for the soul of her father, Peter the Great. This building

was filled with treasures. The iconostase was of gold. Bursting upon one suddenly within the dim interior of the church it was like a great sun rising unexpectedly out of darkness. There were pictures of saints framed in diamonds, emeralds, topazes, black and white pearls, the baroque, the brutal gemming of Asia. There were books of the Gospel with covers of beaten gold, the clasps made of Grecian cameos. There were oriental hangings upon which prayers were written in pearls. There were piles of uncut gems, the dream of Solomon's treasure house come true.

Then the music! She recalled how it terrified her. It was unlike any that she had heard before. It burst forth like a storm with its thunders. They were chanting the responses of the liturgy. For the first time she heard her own name — that strange, new, Russian name — roll forth upon the tide of the music.

"Pray for the soul of the promised bride of his Imperial Highness, the orthodox Great Princess of Russia, Catherine Alexevna!"

And to-night, too, they had prayed for the soul of Catherine Alexevna.

Best of all she remembered the journey to Kiev, across the fields of the Ukraine in spring. There she and the Grand Duke had made their vows to the saints of the Petshersky Cloister. She loved Little Russia. She had always loved it since, and the great grass meadows of the Don. This journey took all summer. It was her first glimpse of interior Russia — old Muscovite Russia.

She recalled the endless ways that wound across the fields, the infinite fields of Little Russia. The measureless land! Wherever one looked there was something vast whose beginning and end one might not know. And

the far, shining horizon that stretched eastward to the ancient deserts. Everywhere the brooding wonder of immensity whose nearness made one mad.

At the gates of Kiev, the old capital city of the Ukraine, a procession of holy men came to meet them, bearing the emblems of the city. Among these there were heathen statues, and a tiny figure of gold and ivory representing the pagan Venus. This recalled her sharply to the present.

It resembled the gift which Nicholas Murievich had brought her from the banks of the Pregel. Elizabeth Petrovna regarded the diminutive statue with reverence. But the Grand Duke regarded it with terror. He trembled and turned white. Then, the Empress told how her father had revered and loved it. He declared that the Venus of the Greeks was still alive, and that she had come to the north and there changed and grown cruel. A lady of the court interrupted her, exclaiming, " See how the Grand Duchess resembles the pagan statue! "

And, as she looked at it, she trembled, because the face of this ancient goddess seemed to have borrowed the cruel pallor of snow.

A knock interrupted her meditation.

" Come in."

Dsiemba entered.

" The valet of the Grand Duke, your Royal Highness, just told me that his master left the palace more than an hour ago. He left by a private exit."

Dsiemba bowed and disappeared.

Catherine Alexevna tightened the sword strap about her waist, adjusted the small cap carefully upon her head, and followed Dsiemba nimbly out the door.

CHAPTER IX

THE MASKED BALL

The splendid George Salon of the Winter Palace was one of the rooms which Rastrelli, the architect, had finished at this time. Like the royal homes of France and England, it was modeled after the renowned and luxurious palaces which Medieval Italy designed for the remainder of the world to copy. The Salon opened into the Winter Garden which was to the front of it. In the rear stood a movable stage whose drop curtain of blue velvet bore in black embroidery the double-headed eagle of Slavic sovereignty.

Around this room, at regular intervals, were small, somewhat deeply set, gilt doors; between the doors marble statues, and above the statues candles which rose in clusters forming multiple long, fine, white, decorative lines. To the right and the left of the George Salon, archways led to invisible promenades. In the foreground, in the Winter Garden, there were symmetrically arranged lemon, orange and oleander trees, white and heavy with flowers. About them brilliantly plumaged tropical birds fluttered. In the center a fountain spouted Hungarian wine. Small ebon black negroes, naked save for blue velvet loin cloths, knelt about the fountain upholding golden cups with which to serve the guests. The garden was fitfully lighted by candles and flaring torches of pine, which, because of the heavy air, flung out wavering, spectral ribbons of smoke, giving to the garden an unreal,

fairylike appearance. The scene recalled at once the setting of the garden revelries of Nero and the delicately rococo and gallant fêtes of the reigning Louis. As with them, here, too, was felt the feverish merriment of a condition that was hastening to the end. Over it hung the wet, brooding silence of the declining hours of sub-Arctic autumn. It was the last regretful hour of a summer that had been too brief.

The Princess Dashkov and Subanski opened the ball by dancing a Moldavian czarda. After this dance the maskers dispersed, some to promenade or chat in groups in the George Salon; others turned toward the invisible galleries on either side, while others, noticeable among whom was a group of young men, entered the Winter Garden. The young men were dressed in French court costume, their easily penetrated disguise being the more or less unusual shape of their silken eye-masks. The Russians were distinguishable by the profusion of heavy gems they wore. As Subanski joined the young men, this Polish exquisite exclaimed, in disgust: "What a ridiculous dance! It was not made for gentlemen! It was made for the hay field! How I hate these vulgar peasant dances! See — I am dripping with perspiration!"

He pulled out a handkerchief of flowered foulard, one yard square, and dried his face and wrists, making display of the handkerchief the while.

"What a beautiful handkerchief!" piped up old Count Alexis Razumovsky, in his weak and senile treble.

"Is it new? Is it the fashion? Tell me."

"Does not Subanski, our Polish friend here," interrupted a French spy, "set the fashion for Petersburg? If he carried a handkerchief three yards square, it would be the thing."

"True, Razumovsky."

"That is what I used to do when I was young," sighed the decrepit old beau. "I set the fashion! I was called then the Adonis of Russia — I —"

"This is the latest thing!" declared Subanski, boastfully. "Fresh from Paris. They are the rage in Dresden and Vienna, too. But I am the only man in Petersburg to carry one."

"I beg your pardon, Subanski, but I have a dozen of assorted colors," taking out a handkerchief of the same size, but adorned with larger and more brilliant flowers.

"You! Where did you get them, Orlov? That merchant shall have ten lashes. To disgrace me like this!"

"Did you ever know an Orlov to get left, Subanski? And now, especially."

The French spies nudged each other and whispered, "See, he dares to boast!"

"He thinks some day he will be Emperor," murmured a Prussian spy in a low voice to his neighbor.

"Where did you get them, Orlov?"

"Count Poniatovsky sent them to me from Paris as a gift."

"Sell me one, Orlov!" pleaded Alexis Razumovsky. "Just one — please! I will pay any price. I will let you have that trained saddle horse of mine for the dozen. Or, I will give you those twin Siberian amethysts. Think, how it would look for me, Alexis Razumovsky, the favorite of two Empresses, to carry an old-fashioned handkerchief!"

"Shut up, old man! Your time is past," observed Orlov, brutally.

With a pitiful attempt at dignity Razumovsky defended himself: "The Empress still lives. And just so long as she does I am the first gentleman of Russia!"

"We have had enough of that," continued Orlov, still

brutally. "You have ruled two Empresses. Some of the rest of us will take a turn at the next one."

"You will let we have one, Subanski, will you not? Think how it would grieve her Majesty — especially now upon her death bed — to know I failed to carry the latest handkerchief. I should weep if I were not so ashamed of the one I carry."

"Orlov!" called Subanski, "if Poniatovsky sent you the handkerchiefs, he has not written you how to use them, has he? That is very important. There are all kinds of discussion over it in Versailles."

"No," replied the Prussian spy. "We are old-fashioned there. We are not much on display."

"Now some say — in Paris," continued Subanski, "that you should take them out like this, by one corner, daintily — So! Let their silken length float gracefully upon the air like an unfolding banner. So! Then, on a sudden — But, mind! — with a scarcely perceptible gesture gather it into your hand. So! And then softly dust your nose. It is not easy. I practised two hours before I could do it. Would you believe that I could not appear at parade to-day, just on that account?"

"Beautiful! Beautiful! Is it not, Gregory Orlov?" quavered the falsetto of old Alexis Razumovsky.

"But in Dresden there is another way."

"Very good court — Dresden —" murmured the French spy, reminiscently. "Next to Petersburg and Versailles."

"Tell us, Subanski. And slowly, so that I may learn," pleaded Alexis Razumovsky.

"Now — there — in Dresden," proceeded Subanski, with delight at being permitted to inaugurate a fashion. "There, you must catch it exactly by the center. So! (This is the Dönhoffs' idea.) Then let the four corners

fall softly down like rose petals. So! And then, unclasp your fingers where you hold it — in the center. See! This way! And display a diamond snuffbox whereon is set a lady's picture. That is the way the Dönhoff has made August the Strong display his a dozen times a day at the court of Dresden."

"Beautiful! Beautiful! Is it not, Gregory Orlov? Alas, that I did not know how to do that for the blessed Empress! How it would have shown off my hands!"

"Ah! what a perfume was that!" exclaimed the Prussian spy, snuffing audibly. *"Ah! Ah!"*

"Fine! Fine!" admitted the French spy. "What is it?"

"You have been too long out of Paris, my French friend," said Subanski, patronizingly.

"New — is it new? Do you think that it is new, Gregory Orlov?" questioned Alexis Razumovsky, with one hand behind his ear, alert as usual whenever fashion was under discussion.

"Of course it is new!" declared Subanski, disdainfully. "The correct perfume is a matter of grave importance. I would as lief wear clothes — yes — *a month old* — as to use a perfume that is out of fashion! This is the latest thing. Smell! Smell! All of you! It was made especially for these foulard handkerchiefs. Do you know what it is? I will bet that you do not. *Rosa cinomomea!*"

"You are wrong again there, Subanski!" contradicted Orlov, in an irritating tone of dominance that had never been noticeable in him before. "That is for ladies' lace handkerchiefs only. And out of fashion for them now."

"My importer assured me, Orlov, that this is what they are using in Paris."

"Count Poniatovsky wrote me, Subanski, direct from

Paris, that that went out at least ten days before he wrote. Now, everyone in the court set uses *parfum à la reine.* How do you like it?" taking out his handkerchief and passing it around.

"Good!" admitted the French spy. "The better, yes — I think so — Yes! Let me smell again. Yes, yes —"

"But there is something at the court of Dresden that beats them all," added the Prussian spy. "The Dönhoff uses nothing else."

"What is it? What is it?" questioned Subanski and Razumovsky in a breath.

"*Parfum de la reine d'Hongrie!* The Dönhoff revived its use. It was first made three hundred years ago."

"Come, Orlov," suggested Subanski, "let us introduce that into Paris! It is high time we began setting fashions instead of following them."

"Right you are, Subanski! We will do it. Paris cannot refuse us anything. She lives off the Russian Court."

"And the very best we can do, Orlov — not sparing money or time — we are at least six weeks behind Paris!"

"Very sad — yes, indeed! Is it not, Gregory Orlov?" complained the faded beau.

"Better be in Prussia than out of the fashion!" laughed Gregory Orlov, with that new note of scorn ringing in his voice. "I beg your pardon," bowing to the Prussian spy. "That is a sort of complimentary jest that we have here in Russia."

"I am glad that you told me. I have never been able to understand Russian jests," retorted the spy.

"You ought to go to England, my good Prussian," said Gregory Orlov, in that condescending voice he was learning so rapidly to use. "They are famous for jests there. They are the kind that you would understand."

The French spy was becoming nervous, and he hastened to turn the conversation to another question of dress which was sure to find favor with these frivolous Sybarites of the north.

" Orlov, what do you say is the proper lace for a gentleman to wear, *point d'alençon,* or *point de champagne?* "

" *Point d'alençon* — decidedly. It is thinner. It falls over the hands better. It shows off rings brilliantly, as if through a veil of mist."

He held up his own hand to illustrate. Upon it were rings with jingling, pendant gems.

" Yet, Orlov," objected Subanski, " if a man has a good wrist — round, white,—well turned — *point de champagne,* turned back, is becoming; shows it off as, *pour exemple,* on my wrist."

" Yes, or mine, Subanski. See! " insisted Razumovsky, holding up a wrinkled trembling hand.

" Our friend Razumovsky, Subanski, would insist upon playing Adonis if he were a hundred."

" If there are two kinds of perfume, Orlov, there is only one kind of hat for a gentleman to wear. My importer just told me. The three-cornered felt has completely supplanted the black wax-cloth! "

Razumovsky put his hand to his deaf ear excitedly.

" What — *What?* Did he say something about clothes, Gregory Orlov? "

" Do not worry, Razumovsky. Do not worry," advised Subanski. " You will soon be too old to wear clothes."

" You cannot guess, Subanski, what a rich thing Poniatovsky wrote me when he sent the handkerchiefs. True, too! Every bit of it! I think that it shows a good deal of penetration on his part. He said the very instant you cross the Russian frontier you can tell which party is in power at court by the card games the soldiers play. What

do you think of that, Subanski? I call that clever, do not you? You know that he is always running back and forth between Paris, Warsaw and Petersburg."

"And he has been running somewhat faster of late than usual, has he not?" put in the Prussian, insolently. Orlov seemingly was deaf to this allusion to the Grand Duchess, and continued with undisturbed serenity.

"In the days of Anna Leopoldovna, and during the youth and health of our blessed Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna, when Russia was being Frenchified, everyone played *La Mouche*. It did not make any difference in what remote place the soldiers were garrisoned; in the Ural, in the Caucasus, or by the sea of Azov. They all played *La Mouche*. This proves how far reaching is the influence of the court. It is like the rain — or God's blessing — it falls evenly over Russia. Now, since her Majesty is old and ill, and the Grand Duke Peter, who is Prussian to the core, is gaining the upper hand, they play Kampis."

"Disgusting game — that," sighed Subanski, reminiscently. "Holstein game,— fit only for Holstein stable boys. Ugh! But if the Grand Duchess comes into power, then there will be a gay change of games for you. Then, they will play *biribis*."

"What kind of game is that?" questioned the Prussian.

"Russian, my good friend! Russian!"

"How can that be?" insisted the spy. "She is not Russian."

"You will see! You will see!" boasted Subanski. "And we will not speak a bad mixture of French and German then as we do now. We will speak Russian — pure Russian."

" Do you not think it will be bad for the Grand Duke's tongue? " queried the Prussian, insolently.

" Not half so bad, my good Prussian, as for his head," retorted the witty Pole.

" You dare —"

" A jest, Sir! A Russian jest, which you say that you are unable to understand."

The Prussian spy had had enough of this subject and inquired suavely:

" Which is the Grand Duchess? Point her out to me."

Gregory Orlov hastened to make reply, " The slender figure — there — in the black domino."

" The black domino? " echoed the quavering voice of Razumovsky. " Handsome woman! But not the equal of Elizabeth Petrovna at her age. You should have seen her! She was the handsomest woman in Europe. And I — I was not —"

" Introduce me," begged the Prussian spy.

" An introduction is not necessary until after the masking," explained Orlov, with suspicious haste.

" Go up and ask her for a dance."

" I am more eager to see her face than anything else! " broke in the French spy. " Then, I can judge if the things they say of her are true."

" What things? " inquired Subanski with feigned innocence.

" Oh! those fairy tales that are going the round of the courts," explained the Prussian.

" What does he mean, Orlov? "

Orlov shook his head and toyed indifferently with his pendant rings.

The French spy was so interested in the subject that he could not refrain from pursuing it.

"They say — at the other courts — that she is as dangerous and as diplomatic as that old snake Bestushev-Rjumin; that she has completely fooled the Grand Duke, who really believes that she is not ambitious, and that she cares only for the church, and her books."

"What do you say to that, Gregory Orlov?" piped up the senile treble of Razumovsky.

"Nothing at all, Razumovsky."

"Good for you, Gregory Orlov! That is the pace I set! When they came to me a few days ago thinking that the blessed Empress was dying and asked me if I had not been married to her secretly, if I did not have a marriage contract — some document of the kind, I replied, 'I have never been anything to the blessed Empress but a humble servant.' Then I got up — right while they were watching me — and took a written document she gave me long ago, and walked across the room and placed it upon the burning logs of the grate. You know that even in summer I am so cold that I have to have a fire." He paused for a moment, saddened by the splendor of memories that could never be renewed.

For that moment some of the former beauty that had made him famous flashed from his faded, weary face.

"You see I am old. I may not live long."

"But I would like to recall to you," said the Prussian, sharply, annoyed at the old man's interruption, "that the Grand Duchess is Prussian."

"Even in Prussia, my good fellow, one berry is not always just like another," retorted Subanski, with Polish wit.

"It is possible, Subanski, that you do not know the things they say of her in Dresden, Vienna, and at my own court, Versailles," explained the French spy, hastening to take the other's part.

"They say that for his own evil ends your Russian Richelieu has made a strange woman out of her; that his black magic has taught her how to be two women in one, a woman of the heart and a woman of the head, who led two separate lives. He has taught her how to divide her life into parts which have no connection with each other; one for love and self-gratification; and one for power and fame."

He looked attentively at his listeners to learn the effect of his words before continuing:

"Just the very day I left Paris I read a letter from the Duc de Broglie, who is in Warsaw now, but who had known her in Petersburg. He admired her. And at the same time he feared her. He wrote not long ago. These are his very words: 'She is the most marvelous woman in Russia and one of the most beautiful. God has given her graces both of body and mind. But at the same time she is dangerous and not to be trusted. She is cold blooded. She is hard. She has a soul as unyielding as adamant. And — strangest of contrasts — a temperament of fire. She unites the grace, the nobility of a veritable queen of romance with the morals of a market woman. She is equally at her ease parrying verbal thrusts with Voltaire, discussing questions of state with Frederick the Great, leading a squadron, or taking part in an orgie that would dazzle a Cæsar.' But there is no chance for anyone — be he never so handsome —" glancing maliciously at Orlov, who was listening with weary indifference, "because the best of her belongs to Count Bestushev-Rjumin. Yes, old as he is — to that ghost of a man."

The mental attitude of Orlov changed.

"He said that, did he?" replied Orlov, in a voice that

resembled the temper of steel, while for a moment his pendant gems stopped their quivering play.

"Yes, he said that — and more!"

"I'd give my head to see her!" declared the French spy.

"Wait! Wait!" admonished the scornful Pole. "You need not be in such a hurry. If the blessed Empress dies to-night and the Grand Duchess comes into power, many of you foreign spies will have a chance to give your heads to her."

While this conversation was going on, the Black Domino and the Daschkov, in the costume of a Moldavian peasant, entered the Garden and paused by the fountain where they remained talking earnestly.

From the invisible galleries on either side of the George Salon, two heralds entered carrying small, gilt trumpets wreathed with flowers. They advanced to the center of the George Salon and then marched side by side into the Winter Garden where they announced:

"Choose your partners for Leo Narishkin's 'Grandfather's Dance!' Choose your partners!"

The coterie of young men separated, the Russians going into the George Salon. The Prussian spy took advantage of the opportunity to address the Black Domino, "May I have the pleasure of this dance?"

"I am tired. I prefer to rest."

"Then may I rest beside you?" The Domino assented.

The French spy addressed the Moldavian peasant, "And you — will you not dance with me?"

"I, too, am tired. That czarda exhausted me. Let us stand here by the Salon and watch the others."

They moved away toward the George Salon and paused by the entrance. The Black Domino and the Prus-

sian spy walked along under the flowering trees to the front of the garden where soon their figures were sheltered from the general view.

Leo Narishkin, out of enthusiasm for the dance which he invented and which bore his name, took off his mask and stood near the entrance of the garden, calling off merrily the order of the dance in imitation of peasant fashion.

"Have I the honor to address the Grand Duchess of Russia?" ventured the Prussian spy, under the fragrant shelter of an orange tree.

"Does not a question of that kind infringe upon the rules of the game?"

"If it does it is to play, perhaps, a greater game."

"But it takes two to play a game, does it not? I may not wish to play."

"We have not time to waste the night in parleying. It is imperative that I know."

"Imperative! Why?"

"I have a message to deliver — a verbal message to her alone."

"I am listening."

"Then that means that you are the Grand Duchess of Russia, does it not?"

"Did I not say that I listened?"

"But that may be an evasion. I cannot trust to doubtful evidence. The cause is too urgent. Give me proof."

The Domino turned back the glove and showed the ring.

"Is not this proof? See — the crest!"

"Yes — that is proof of a certain kind. But I must be sure. Lift your mask for the space of an instant."

"That I may not do."

"We are hidden by the trees. No one could see. Lift

your mask just a little! I dare not risk the possibility of a mistake."

"Have I not told you that that I may not do?"

Leo Narishkin's voice sang merrily and clearly.

"Tournez à gauche! Tournez à droite!"

"Parole d'honneur, your Royal Highness?" questioned the spy, seeing that further insistence was useless.

"Parole d'honneur," replied an even voice, whose tone was covered by the music of the dance.

"First, I am instructed by my royal master to extend to you his sympathy in the present strained relations that are known to exist between yourself and her Majesty, and between yourself and the Grand Duke."

He wishes, thought Nicholas Murievich quickly, to impress upon me, first his understanding of the insecurity of my position, and secondly my need of help.

"You are a Prussian. Therefore, he sympathizes with —"

"There you are wrong. And so is your royal master. I am the very best Russian of them all."

Leo Narishkin sang gayly, enjoying the popularity of the dance he designed.

"Balancez! Balancez!"

"And, further, my royal master wishes me to express to you his surprise — more, his grief,— that in the present war you should have written to General Aprakin: 'Go on! Teach Frederick the Great a lesson! Confine him within his old boundaries.' That is not patriotic. That is not grateful."

"How could he expect anything else?"

"But, your Royal Highness, who can look with pleasure upon the destruction of his home?"

"You must remember that I am now a Russian — the

Crown Princess of all the Russias. I did as I shall do again."

"Wait! Wait! Do not say that!" exclaimed the spy, in a voice in which anger was audible.

"But before you were the Crown Princess of Russia, do you know who you were? You do not! If you did, you would not be so foolish. Yes — foolish! You will never wear the crown unless you change your present attitude. You are the natural daughter of Frederick the Great!"

This statement, which Nicholas Murievich sensed at once to be the fateful secret, came like a stroke of the lightning, laming and disorganizing his mind.

"It is your own father, your own country which you help to destroy. With you as with other people, blood must be thicker than water. In the depths of the heart there must be love for one's own. Beyond personal aims, there is duty to humanity and a more intelligent living. What is the crown of this barbarous Russia in comparison with the crown of that country where you were born? And there — if you should return, there is no telling what power might — in time — be yours."

"But I am not so easily convinced, my good Prussian. I must have proofs," replied Nicholas Murievich, in a voice that trembled slightly and whose trembling was not lost upon the subtle spy.

"I must have proofs!"

"I will give them, your Royal Highness — but, on conditions. They are worth purchasing. They are great enough, important enough. The first condition is that you use your influence with Count Bestushev-Rjumin to-night to call off the army which is encamped by Berlin. The effort need not be known. Your quick wits can find ways that will not lead to discovery. You can have a secret

courier set out for there at once. Secondly, if the Empress dies and the Grand Duke, your husband, reigns even for a day —"

Here the spy's voice dropped to an irritating whisper and he looked at his vis-à-vis cunningly, a leer upon his smooth and evil face.

"He is ill, is he not? He cannot live long?"

"Yes,— he is ill —"

"Is he in your opinion very ill?"

"I have no opinion."

"That is what they say, is it not, your Royal Highness?"

"It is."

"Very well, then. One of the important conditions is that, should you come to the throne, you will depose Count Bestushev-Rjumin and give up new Russia."

"I am not to be dictated to."

"Very well. These are the conditions."

"But time does many things. Give me time," parried Nicholas Murievich, hoping that in some way which he could not think out just now, he could send the news to Catherine Alexevna.

"Time?"

"To consider."

"I must have my answer to-night."

"Very well. Have it so, then," was the reply, catching at a possible expedient of thought.

"I will give my answer to your king, to you and to all Russia — to-night, in the tableau in which I take part at the close of the ball. Now give me your proofs."

"But how do I know that your answer will be favorable to me and to my cause? How can I give you the proofs?"

"If you do not give them to me, they may be valueless

after to-night. If you do give them to me and they are what you say they are, there is, at least, a possibility of success for you. You ought to be able to rely upon their power. I, at least, can agree to no other conditions."

"Is that fair? The advantage is all with you."

"The advantage is always with the person who is strong enough to take it. You, of course, know what the proofs are. You are the only one who can estimate their power. At least — you ought to be able to estimate them."

"I can! Here are some of them. But this is no place to display written documents of great importance. To do so would be to attract attention. We must go elsewhere. What do you say to going on to the Dresden Woman's? There would not be many there to-night. The court set are here. Now here is a letter written by Frederick the Great to your mother. But read this passage in this other letter first, 'You know I have always wanted to arrange a brilliant marriage for your daughter.' Does your Royal Highness know that he put aside his own sister to make you the Empress of Russia? Do you suppose that he would have done that, if you had not been nearer and dearer to him? He helped defray your expenses and your mother's on that first memorable journey to Russia — out of his own pocket. You know what that means to a man as miserly as he. He took all the pains in the world to protect you on that journey, from wolves and from bandits. He sent his couriers ahead to make the way safe. Your mother was visiting in the neighborhood of his father's castle, when he was just a boy. She was with him every day. It was to her that he told the story of his stern father's hard dealing with himself, and arrogant ways. Then, unexpectedly, came command for your mother to marry the Prince of Anhalt, a

man years her senior. She complied with the command. In a few months you were born, and you were named Sophie *Friedericka.* The instant Frederick became king he loaded your father with unmerited honors, advanced him from one command in the army to another. And for no apparent reason whatever, because he did not possess ability in military affairs.

" Did you ever hear what Frederick the Great said to the Prince de Ligne one day in speaking of your brother — who is evidently your real brother — ? This is what he said: ' I believe that it is sometimes necessary to cross *les races en empire.* I adore the children of love! Look at the Maréchal de Saxe — and my Anhalt, a man full of talent.' Just the other day — before I left Prussia — he wrote about your Royal Highness, ' Surely a Grand Duchess of Russia, raised and educated in the Prussian land and owing to its sovereign all her future, must be upon the Prussian side.' "

Leo Narishkin's merry voice rose above the music, and the rhythm of the dancing feet, calling out: *" Chaine — Chaine — Tournez à gauche! Tournez à droite!"*

" And I have other proofs which I can show you: stories of your mother's youth and her love affair with Frederick of Prussia when he was not yet king, and his father was living. I can tell you details of her forced and hurried marriage to the man upon whom the present king heaped so many unmerited honors. Your mother was little more than a child. She was barely fifteen. I can tell you how the king instructed his diplomats not to spare gold to bribe the diplomats of other nations to use their influence in selecting you for the Russian marriage. Surely, you cannot be ungrateful now that you know. Surely you cannot strike the hand that created you! "

Nicholas Murievich was overwhelmed with the disclosure. It drove from his mind the warning of the Grand Duchess, and the multiform dangers of the fateful night. Of such a disclosure he had not dreamed. What would the result be when it was made known to Catherine Alexevna? Who could estimate its effect upon her? Would it be the death blow to his own hopes? Would it make her forget her dream of conquering the south? Would the result be the making of a union in the future between Russia and Prussia? Would it put an end to his hope of a free Greece? Would the result be that Russia would make no more plans for the south, and would he be obliged to give up his ambition of being humbly instrumental in wresting Greece from Turkey, and in restoring the glory which was the desire of his race? And yet, perhaps, it was not true. Ah — blessed thought! Perhaps it was not true! But he must find out. He must find out everything that it was possible to find out, before the secret reached the ears of Catherine Alexevna. It was ridiculous — improbable. And yet he must learn all there was to learn about it and be able to combat it at every turn. It did not occur to him to connect this story with the plot he had caught wind of against the Grand Duchess and himself, and of which he had warned her. He had never seen the game of politics played at close quarters as the great play it, where death is the potent joker. His heart was filled with the pleasant dream of doing something great for her.

" We are attracting attention, your Royal Highness." The suave, insinuating voice of the spy interrupted his thinking. " Can we not leave the ball for a little while, that I may have a better opportunity to show you the

proofs? I have important documents and letters to put before you."

The surprise of the communication had erased from the mind of Nicholas Murievich the command of Catherine Alexevna on no account to leave the ball until she returned.

"Can we not go to some place where we can have more freedom and not fear inquisitive eyes?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then let us go straight to the Dresden Woman's. It is near. We can be back within the hour. There will not be a crowd there to-night. We can be by ourselves. Let us join the dance and slip out by one of the little gilt doors beside the stage — in the rear of the George Salon."

They waited until the dance again assumed the form of a grand march, when they slipped in. In the grand right and left or the "*chaine*" that followed, they danced until they reached the rear of the room, where the uniform gilt doors were, when they disappeared without causing comment.

After they had crossed the hall outside they could still hear the music, and the merry voice of Leo Narishkin singing vigorously: "*Tournez à gauche! Tournez à droite! Balancez! Balancez! Chaine — Chaine —*" With Nicholas Murievich it was *tournez à gauche* forever, and the road led out of life. He never reached the Dresden Woman's. The plot, which had been forming for weeks against the life of the Grand Duchess, broke over him. They hurried him into a closed carriage where he was bound and gagged. The driver took the river road that led to the Gulf of Finland by Oranienbaum. Not many hours later the dead body of Nicholas

Murievich lay just where Maschuta's had lain the night before.

The Prussian spy, who committed the crime, was rowed out to a black ship that was waiting sullenly in the misty darkness to bear back to the protection of Prussia the trusted servant who had been successful in putting an end to that Russian princess who had thwarted the plans of Frederick the King. As for the Russian driver, he bore back to Petersburg enough Prussian gold to buy for himself a *meierhof* amid the rich meadows of the Don.

In the meanwhile, at the ball, just as Leo Narishkin's "Grandfather's Dance" was ending with a flourish of noise and laughter, one of the gilt doors in the rear of the George Salon opened and Count Bestushev-Rjumin, unmasked, appeared. He looked exceedingly tall as he entered, stooped of shoulder, and thin and fragile to a degree to excite wonderment. But his look belied his spirit. He was in great good humor. The inspired light of victory was upon his face. He had just demonstrated his strategical superiority. He had set in motion one of his far reaching and cruel plans which he knew had succeeded. Like a scattered skyrocket, it had burst and its dropping, golden sparks had dealt death to those whom he desired to die. In addition to being successful, the plan had been artistic. And no one could connect him with it! At the same time he had played a gay trick upon his enemy, Frederick of Prussia. It was the thought of Frederick in particular that lighted the fire of joy and triumph in his sunken eyes.

"In a well planned, diplomatically managed disappearance," he was meditating pleasantly as he entered among the youthful merrymakers, "there should be humor and some of the heightening accessories of art." No one

would have regretted a vulgar and inartistic disappearance of an enemy more than he. Anyone could succeed awkwardly. But not everyone could succeed gracefully, with opposing obstacles reduced to invisibility. Not everyone could wrap crime within the glory of genius.

"And what a splendid joke on Frederick of Prussia — to have abducted the wrong person! The poorest creature who had been trained under me would not have blundered like that. When Frederick finds out what has happened, he will know who has done it. He will recognize my handiwork. He has seen it before. It may occur to him to compare it with the lightning,— coming swiftly and he knows not whence. I think that I remember that he compared me once with the subterranean forger of fire — but less politely.. One of the faults of Frederick is," he meditated, "that he lacks humor. He forgets the joy of the situation in the black anger of his heart. There is nothing that can succeed without joy — not even crime. Frederick has never been able to jest with death.

"Well, Murievich is out of the way. He had a good time here in Russia while he lived — grew several crops of fond and pleasant delusions. People who devote themselves exclusively to farming delusions seldom live long. There is something about that crop that interferes with length of days. Well, well — He had a good time in Russia! I let him have it. He was a toy with which to amuse her Highness. Love is a pleasant toy with which to amuse a woman. He owes me gratitude for having lived so long. If he had happened to have planted a few facts among his follies, I should have let him live on — I think —

"Maschuta is comfortably disposed of, too, which leaves Orlov free for my use. And my good friend

Frederick, over the border, will rest and relax that inquisitive mind of his just as soon as the spy tells him that the Grand Duchess is dead.

"How very comfortable and happy he will be, while I send my armies to storm the walls of Berlin!"

It was no wonder that the "Russian Fox" showed his grinning teeth. To-night one saw more clearly than usual his lack of resemblance to the Slavic race. One saw his English blood. There was nothing of the "*stock Russian*" evident. Genius and cosmopolitan living had removed every trace of nationality.

The discerning eye of the Great Peter found this diplomatic genius, took him from the masses and educated him. He was fifteen when his royal patron sent him to Europe to be trained into a government servant. He wandered through north European cities: Utrecht, Hanover, London, Hamburg, the Hague, Copenhagen. He spoke French, German, Latin, English, Russian. In Copenhagen he had compounded his "Elixir of Life," sometimes called "Bestushev's Drops," which was in use throughout the continent. When George I was made King of England, it was Count Bestushev-Rjumin whom that monarch sent to announce his coronation to Petersburg. He would have preferred the medical to the diplomatic profession. It was necessity that made him master of intrigue instead of a master of science.

Even when Elizabeth, the Empress, was present the cringing courtiers did reverence to the Great Chancellor just as if he had been her superior in rank. Yet there was not one of them all who liked him. They hated him. They feared him. At the same time, they were proud of him. And he looked down upon them all with a measureless contempt for their weakness or their inability. To-night, as he entered the George Salon, he pre-

sented a picture fit for the cold, thin, eloquent brush of Goya. What a pity that Goya could not have painted him! All the courts of Europe had helped to make this man of impressive power. He had stolen their worldly finish, their wisdom, their diplomatic ease.

In the wandering days of his youth the cultivation of the continent had touched him. It had left upon him its power and its richness of learning.

Dressed uniformly in black, without the brightening of white ruffles, he was sharply contrasted with the maskers. His only ornament was a diamond framed medallion portrait of Peter the Great suspended from his neck by a chain of jet. His hands were so remarkable that they could not escape notice. They were beautiful and aristocratic, and so thin that they were wellnigh transparent. But they were hands better suited to commands of cruelty than to caresses or kindness. In conversation they were as eloquent as his tongue.

His face was refined and alert, and moulded sensitively by thought. The instant he entered the George Salon there was a hush. Fear and submission were apparent. The maskers separated and left an unimpeded pathway for him. He walked haughtily along without looking either to right or left, nor did he take notice of any individual until he had crossed the Salon and reached the edge of the Winter Garden, where he turned toward Gregory Orlov, who, with two spies, was resting from the dance.

" I wish you a good evening, Count Bestushev-Rjumin," said Orlov, stepping forward and bowing humbly.

The dancers listened eagerly to the conversation and showed their interest by vivid pantomime behind their backs.

"I need not return that wish to you, Sir, since we all know that it is a good evening for the Orlovs."

The spies, emboldened by their belief that the Grand Duchess was dead, since they had seen her leave the hall with one of their number, nudged each other triumphantly. It was evident that the words had made impression upon the listening crowd. The French spy, believing the opposition had triumphed, became insolent and tried his wit upon the Great Chancellor,—

"It seems likewise to be a good evening for Prussia, Count Bestushev-Rjumin, else why are there so many Holstein uniforms present?"

"The season, my young friend,— the season! Winter is near. Cabbages and turnips are not sprouting in the gardens. Therefore, Holstein uniforms take their place. A cabbage is a very good substitute for a Holsteiner."

The listening dancers laughed aloud and a breath of merriment swept the crowd. Every Slav was proud of the old bear whose snarling teeth could hold a world at bay.

The French spy could not put up with defeat and tried again for victory.

"I met the Grand Duke to-night, Count Bestushev-Rjumin, who may — I suppose at any moment — be Emperor," glancing triumphantly at the Prussian spy, beside him. "He wore a Holstein uniform."

"Very likely — very likely — my young friend. He wears it for his health. He is chilly — has thin blood. He thinks the collar protects his neck. You have heard our Russian proverb, have you not? 'The green apple is not sweet; the young man not strong.'"

"With your permission, Great Chancellor, I would

suggest that time is a cure for both. It ripens the apple and strengthens the man."

"Time! — young man!" flung back a voice as cruel as the blast of an Arctic winter. "What have we to do with that? Pray to your God for that!"

He walked angrily away into the Winter Garden and the Prussian spy followed him,

"Great Chancellor, may I have the honor of a few moments' conversation?"

"I do not know of anything to prevent you. The freedom of the ball is yours, I suppose, as much as anyone's."

"I do not wish to bore you, Great Chancellor, to annoy you, but —"

"Come, come! I am not a courtier. Do not expect me to say — I am delighted. The pleasure is all mine."

"May I beg you humbly, Great Chancellor, to come a little nearer — a little farther this way, I mean? I do not wish the others to hear."

"I regret greatly that I am not one of the others."

"Not all duties are pleasant to me —"

"Enough!" Again it was as if a blast of ice struck his hearers with a burning and a bitter cruelty.

When they reached the front of the Winter Garden, Count Bestushev-Rjumin suddenly became forgetful of the spy and walked to and fro, his hands folded behind his back, talking to himself as was his habit.

"The French ought to give up diplomacy! All they can do is to scrape and bow. They are a race of dancing masters."

The Prussian spy, confused, coughed awkwardly in an attempt to attract the attention of the Chancellor.

" You here still! You seem to resemble God's poor — Well,— what do you want? "

" I have a —"

Again the Great Chancellor was plunged in meditation and forgetful of the spy.

" And the Prussians ought to give up diplomacy and grow vegetables. That is what they were made for — How are they different from us? The Little Russians — they are musicians, artists, dreamers — the Great Russians — subtler — yes, than the devil himself."

" Pardon, Great Chancellor, the interruption. The cause is urgent and the night is passing. Even God, whom you told my French friend to ask for time, will not make a night eternal save that long one — whose approach may He forfend."

" Well? "

" My message is a pitiful one."

" Well."

" I beg you to listen, Great Chancellor, with sympathy."

" Well! "

" My royal master, Frederick of Prussia, authorizes me to acknowledge his defeat, his complete overthrow, in the long battle of diplomacy which has been waged between him and you, and to sue you, not as an opponent, but as a suppliant."

" Well —"

" No personal good can come to you now that he has acknowledged your superiority, by further pushing his ruin and that of Berlin. Your pride is satisfied, your revenge. And Russia is great enough."

" Well, well! Time and I — we can defeat anyone."

At these words there flitted through the mind of the

Prussian the foolish fables of the people, and the gossip of the peasants that this old man had lived forever.

"Your devotion to Russia has lasted long enough. Besides, this country cannot possibly be to you what Prussia is to my master. It is his birthplace, his inherited possession. You cannot love it the same way. You cannot be expected to. You are fighting for glory. He is fighting for home and country.

"When he entered this battle with you, Count Bestushev-Rjumin, he was a young man. See what you have done to him! He is feeble and old now, and broken in health. You have stolen away his youth. Why, in Berlin to-day they call him 'Old Fritz'! What greater has a man to give than his health and his youth! You have stolen them all away.

"There are other things, too, Great Chancellor, that you should consider. He is the child of Prussia, the descendent of its kings, the keeper of its honor. You are only the paid servant here. You do not come of a knightly race. You cannot love as he can. You cannot grieve as he can. Consider this, Great Chancellor, the difference, and call back the Russian army! You have gained your end! Surely you are satisfied!"

"Well, well! Who lives learns. And the world says that I have lived a good deal. I do not love this country as he loves Prussia! Then what is it that I have worked for? Is it reasonable to suppose that a brain great enough to outwit your wily Frederick and check the ambitious schemes of Europe would work for, or be satisfied with, a petty personal revenge? If that had been my object, I should have failed. Is there no one great enough to take my measure? Has no one understood? What is it, think you, that I have worked for? Am I rich? I am the poorest man in Russia. Even the house

I live in is not my own. As every one knows, it was purchased with money which I borrowed from England. I have nothing to call my own. Where are the orders, the insignia of rank which your kings have offered? Do you see them? Do I wear them? Have I titles, land, gold? What is it then?"

"Fame — perhaps —"

"Fame! What is that? It is the idlest caprice of nature! It is the fool's cap which Life places upon the head of them who are unworthy."

"Then what reward? For reward there must be —"

"*Silence!* God and my conscience will reward me. There is only one thing that can make a man forget self; that can make illness and old age as if they were not; that can make him deaf to the allurement of gold — and that is love. That is what I have worked for! Love for Russia and for my blessed master, Peter the Great. Your Frederick is a cipher to his country in comparison with what I am to Russia. It was thrust upon him. He had neither desire nor ambition. I have made Russia! It is the child of my brain. Consider for a moment. What it took Rome centuries to do, Peter the Great and I did in one brief life. Death called him. I am alone now! I am alone."

The proud spirit had vanished. The erect flamelike figure was bent. He was just a weak and feeble old man with trembling, transparent hands upon which were the purple, knotted veins of age. His face looked as white and as unearthly as if it were ready to crumble.

The Prussian spy continued speaking to ears that were apparently deaf:

"But to continue, Great Chancellor, life is necessary. In addition to what I said before, Frederick the King comes to you as a friend. He knows, as do we all, that

your present position is precarious. You have never been able to win the affection of Elizabeth Petrovna. Now, you share with the Grand Duchess her disfavor. If she recovers, you will be exiled — Siberia — death there, — perhaps — If she does not recover and the Grand Dukes reigns, your fate will be the same."

"Death? No, no! I think not," laughing a thin, cold laugh that made his hearer shudder, and recall afresh the foolish stories of the Ghostly Chancellor's indestructibility.

"Exile? Yes; perhaps — for a time. But what of that? The Grand Duke cannot reign. But — the Grand Duchess can."

"Do not count upon the Grand Duchess," replied the Prussian spy with the joyous secret of her supposed death, which he himself had helped to plan, trembling upon his tongue. "She is the natural daughter of Frederick the Great."

"Do you suppose, young man, that you are in a position to tell things to me of which I never heard?"

The ring of steel had crept gradually back into the voice again and its cruel inflexibility had stiffened the frail figure.

Oh! how he wished that he dared to tell him that she was dead!

"Frederick the Great made her body — so the gossips say — what of that? I made her mind. She is my other self."

"But you cannot know what she can do, Great Chancellor. She may die. Death comes to all. Then, why suffer a temporary disgrace when it can be avoided so easily?"

"What do you mean? Speak out."

"This! Retire for a time from power in order, later,

to rule uninterruptedly. In return for a slight favor, Frederick the Great will make you Duke of Courland or Hospodar of Moldavia —"

"With that you could not lure a dog from the oven!"

"Wait. Wait. Let me finish. And in gold you may name your own figure — even to the half of the revenues of Prussia. By the greatness of his offer measure his respect, his admiration —"

"Aye, aye! And his fear! Do you suppose I do not understand? While I live, he knows that he will never be master of the north. He knows that in me he has a rival who works unceasingly. Do I not know that to each of his ambassadors, until it was my pleasure that he should send no more, he has given these instructions, *'Bestushev-Rjumin must be destroyed'?* He knows that I am the only one living who understands the ambitious dream of Peter the Great. He knows that I am the only one who can train its youthful rulers to carry out that dream.

"Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the offer tempted me. Should I have the right to sell? More! — should I have the power to sell? Would it come within my jurisdiction to change the decrees of nature? No, it would not! Besides, it is not a question of myself, or of which one shall be the one to rule, that is at stake. It is a question of the progress of a race and a nation. It is the question of Russia as a European power.

"Your king is eager for Europe to lose sight of us. He wishes to change our rulers back again into Eastern princelings. He wishes to make us give up our new capital, Petersburg."

"Would not that please your people? That is what they wish. Is not their welfare a ruler's first care? Your people are, for the most part, Muscovites of the old

school. They hate your new city. They have no sympathy with your plans for conquest and civilization. What do they care for the provinces you have wrested from Sweden? What do they care for your new sea power, or the Baltic lands? Nothing! Nothing at all! They want to go back to their great, princely estates upon the plains of central Russia where they can live just as their ancestors lived — untouched by foreign influence. They love Moscow and Kiev."

"It is their duty to follow, not to lead."

"You have recalled me to my own duty, Great Chancellor. It is mine to follow. Name your conditions. The King, my royal master, will grant them."

"You misunderstand me. So does your royal master. I am not a Prussian shopkeeper. I do not know how to bargain."

"What answer shall I take to my master, Great Chancellor?"

"What you wish."

"But what answer from you?"

"It is unimportant."

"Must I return emptyhanded?"

"You might recall to his mind — if it is your pleasure — that when Peter the Great told me to choose a motto for my family, I chose these words: *'Semper idem.'*"

"But surely you will send him some other word, something in keeping with his generous kindness?"

"Well, well — then — Yes. Yes! Since you insist. Tell your royal master that Bestushev-Rjumin says that he is too merry with his purse."

CHAPTER X

MUHR'S ON THE MORSKOI

Muhr's Coffee House on the Morskoi shared with the Dresden Woman's popularity and patronage in Petersburg in the middle of the Great Century. It was a brilliant, Bohemian place of rendezvous such as France was rapidly making fashionable. It was, likewise, a gambling resort for men and women of the upper class, where that engrossing passion of the race might be seen in its perfection. Here, the latest delicacies in food might be had and the newest papers. And here, too, fashion sheets were passed around free of charge just as they were in the Imperial Theater between the acts. At either end of the oblong large room which served as restaurant, were doors, low, square, and provided with bolts made of wood. The door on the left opened into the kitchen and was the waiters' place of entrance. The one on the right was the street door. The walls were bare save for an occasional icon beneath which burned a candle, and long, slanting holders of iron into which torches were stuck, which splashed the room with shadows.

At one of the uncovered wooden tables were the Grand Duke Peter, his negro dwarf, Narcissus, crouching at his feet; Elizabeth Woronzov and Countess Bruce in men's attire; and a Prussian and a French spy.

The Grand Duke's face looked pinched and pitiful. His eyes were vague and seemed to be dashed with fretful tears. He looked more slender than usual, and sickly.

His loose hung, awkward body seemed to be held together by his Holstein uniform. To-night two expressions changed constantly upon his face, as if from the depths of that unmeasured sea of the soul, called self, two different persons took turn about in floating up to the plane of visibility. One, the inspired face of a dreamer, with eyes that saw above and beyond; the other, the face of a trembling, capricious idiot, disfigured by smallpox and disease. Upon his weak, slender hand there was a medallion portrait of Frederick the Great set in a large awkward ring. Elizabeth Woronzov was young, fat, short, dark haired, and of a rather pure Slav type of central Russia. Her eyes were green and set a trifle aslant, opening widest, Calmuck-wise, at the outer corners; her nose was *retroussé* and a little short; her lips were too red. The face had little intelligence and no nobility. The Countess Bruce had round, merry, brown eyes that sparkled with malice; reddish brown hair, a little moustache, and round red cheeks. They were playing kampis, the game beloved of Holstein. In front of the ladies and the Grand Duke were small, richly chased saucers of solid gold filled with unset gems that flamed savagely under the torches. Beside each saucer was a diminutive spoon of gold with which to lift the gems. These luxurious gambling accessories were made in France especially for the court of Russia.

The Grand Duke was bending over the table eagerly, his nervous face quivering with excitement.

"Play, Elizabeth Woronzov. Play. Play. How can you keep me waiting like this?"

"Your Highness, why should I risk a gem that I love for a paper card that is worthless? I think I will not."

"Play, play! Do you not see that I am waiting?

Why do you do things like this? Why do you all annoy me all you can?"

Narcissus cuddled up to him closely and leaned his black, foolish head against his leg.

Elizabeth Woronzov put down the card slowly and reluctantly.

"Mine! Still mine! Now, Countess Bruce, it is your turn. Put down your card."

"Not until I am ready. I am not Elizabeth Woronzov. I do as I please. Now guess, your Highness. Do you think that you have won? Can you not wait a moment? What is the matter with you that you are so restless and impatient?"

"Do not act like that! Put it down, I say — *Put it down!*" trembling with diseased nerves that nothing could control.

She played.

"Mine! All mine! You, Countess Bruce, owe me a sapphire."

"Here it is," lifting one with the tiny spoon and depositing it in the Grand Duke's saucer.

"And you, Elizabeth Woronzov, a ruby."

"I haven't any."

"Come,— pay! Do not be a baby! You always oppose me and make things difficult. Why do you do it? Narcissus here is the only one who loves me and tries to make me happy," patting the head whose eyes glanced up at him with the devotion of a dog.

"I cannot give you something that I do not own, can I? Look for yourself if you do not believe it! You are always just so unreasonable. I have piled them into pyramids. See! There are the diamonds, there the emeralds, here the sapphires. Do you see them?"

"Yes, yes! Plenty of them! Lean over here!"

yielding to one of his lovable, unreasoning inclinations, he kissed her. "The lips of Elizabeth Woronzov are dearer than the rubies of Russia."

"That is not fair," cried Countess Bruce. "She loses and still wins."

"When you play with a Grand Duke of Russia," throwing off easily his moment of ill humor, "*qui perd gagne toujours*. Now we will cut for the deal. I stake these three diamonds on the cut. Look at them! Are they not beautiful? Who beats me gets them. Now is your chance, Countess Bruce. High wins."

The cards were dealt and placed upon the table.

"Narcis, fill the goblets with Hungarian wine. First, Elizabeth Woronzov, you begin. Cut. Cut, I say! Why are you so slow!"

"Two of diamonds."

"Not enough!" exclaimed Countess Bruce.

"Go on, Countess! Cut first. I am sure to win."

Countess Bruce cuts.

"King of spades."

"Now why did you do that? You know that that is bad luck for me. Spades mean death. You could just as well have cut something else, if you had tried."

"Cut yourself, then! See if you do better. The aces are out."

The Grand Duke cut.

"Five of hearts! Lost! By the body of Holy Isaac! Here are your diamonds."

"I call these better than the rubies of Elizabeth Woronzov."

The Grand Duke picked up the cards and threw them across the room in anger.

"Accursed luck! That means that something is going to happen — to me."

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Prussian spy. "Brace up! Nerve and steadiness of purpose are what you need. Unlucky at cards, lucky at love."

"That may be true with you, but it isn't with us. Here in Russia we say, 'Lucky in love, unlucky in life.'"

"How can that be, your Highness? Love and life are one."

"I am not going to argue. We will deal again. I will not stand for this. Pick up those cards, Narcis. Pick them up! Quickly, you black devil! Good, Narcis! Now drink some of my wine." He held the goblet down with a tenderness that was almost loving toward the black hideous mouth.

"Is not this enough to-night, your Royal Highness?" questioned Elizabeth Woronzov. "Please do not play more to-night. We are wasting time."

"To-night there are more important things to attend to, your Royal Highness," pleaded the Prussian spy.

"Yes, that is right," affirmed the French spy. "Another time is best."

"Quickly — hand me those cards, Narcis," his face twitching painfully.

"You are a fool, Narcis — and they say that I am not much better. But I'd give everything in the world for you and one year of peace in Sweden. Just one year of peace again among the mountain farms — where I used to live when I was a child. They were so green, and the night came down with such peace. There is nothing in Russia I want. There is nothing that can make me happy. There is nothing here but blood and death. If one does not die, then there is fear and worry. I think I would rather die and have it over with.

"The scent of blood — the blood of battles and the blood of the poor people who died in building this fateful

city — is in the air. I smell it all the time. I cannot get away from it. There are not perfumes enough in Petersburg to dull it. That is why they love flowers here so. It is a secret we guard carefully. We love them to shut out the smell of blood!

"But the flowers cannot keep it away from me. Nothing can. I smell it all the time. No matter where I go or what I do, I can smell it. I can smell it in my sleep. The blood of battles is in this air, where for so many generations the armies of Sweden, Prussia and Poland have fought, and the Cossacks of the Don."

He had become forgetful of his audience and their fears, and the fate of the futile crown that was trembling above his head. The twitching of his face had stopped, and his eyes, temporarily strong and dominant, were looking ahead and beyond into a land that none but he could see.

"Come, come, your Highness," begged Countess Bruce, "play no more to-night."

He dropped speedily from his splendid land of dreams and visions where even he sometimes could rule, and the old fretfulness reasserted itself.

"Of course! Of course! Just so sure as I am enjoying myself some one says — 'Don't!' It has always been that way. I have never done anything I wanted to."

"Do not be unreasonable, and grieve and disappoint us again to-night," insisted Elizabeth Woronzov, in an impatient voice.

"*Again!* you say. I suppose I am in the habit of grieving and disappointing people? I suppose I do it right along, do I not?"

"You do not wish to waste the most precious night of your life, do you?"

"Give me the counters then! Keep what you have won — both of you."

He gathered up the saucers and spoons sulkily, fitting one into the other and handed them to Narcissus, who put them into a velvet bag that hung suspended from his shoulder.

Then, the Grand Duke placed a glass box upon the table to receive the gems which he had emptied into his hands where he passed them back and forth from one hand to the other admiringly. The two ladies placed theirs in similar glass boxes which they put into their pockets.

"Are they not lovely?" he exclaimed, dazzled by a wavering flash of torchlight that enlivened them and called out their sleeping splendor.

"Are they not lovely? I have never loved but three things — music and cards and gems — and you, Narcis," patting tenderly the shapeless head. "Nothing else can make me happy. Look! Look!" dropping them slowly from hand to hand so that the torches might strike through them.

"If I only had the fire that is in their cold hearts, you would not need to admonish me. Oh! — I know, I know — You need not look at each other like that! I know what they all say of me — and you, too! All but Narcis, here. He is the only person in the world who is true to me. He is the only person in the world who loves me — the only one. And he ought to envy me — poor devil! I am capable of stealing his profession. Just wait, Narcis,— you shall have your chance yet! Just wait! When I am Emperor we will change places for a day — you and I. You shall be Emperor and I will be fool."

"Come, come, do not waste more time," pleaded

Countess Bruce. " Put up the gems and sit down here."

But the Grand Duke did not hear a word that was said to him. He was absorbed in forgetful contemplation of the gems he loved. He poured them delightedly through his hands for the torches to pierce them with their flames. Or, again, he held them singly, one by one, in order to peer intently into their shivering hearts. " Rubies! They are warrior gems,— triumphant, despotic, glowing with a savage splendor. See! — the red hate in that one's heart! Sapphires! They are ecstatic saints sanctified by the sight of God. I could pray to them. Emeralds! " Here his voice faltered and the old, quick tears veiled his eyes. " Emeralds! They are the color of the peaceful, wet, green meadows of Sweden I saw when I was a child; meadows under the edge of ancient forests."

He paused to choke back a sob that shook his voice:

" If I had my violin, I could tell you all about them. Diamonds! The joy of death when it speeds shining from the steel — the joy of death! "

For the inspired fervor of the instant a ghostly, fleeting likeness to that imperial general, his grandfather, Charles XII, of Sweden, flashed from his person and then faded softly away.

" Your Highness," persisted the trained, expressionless voice of the French spy, " let us begin the subject we came here to discuss. The night is no longer young. We are wasting it."

" You all try to make me unhappy. Why did I not stay at home and play with my dolls? "

At this point in their conversation Catherine Alexevna entered in her disguise as a soldier. She seated herself at one of the little tables, but within hearing distance,

with her back toward the royal party. Narcissus looked at her attentively and uneasily. Something compelling touched his senses, which he could not understand; something vague, tantalizing, and in a slight degree unpleasant. Suddenly, that instinct of penetration belonging to fools and animals forced the truth upon him. His face convulsed in a spasm of helpless fear and his teeth began their old-time chattering. He had heard them say that she was dead. And here was the dead come back to life. How he hated and feared her, this woman with the eyes of sapphire, that could burn their will into his brain! Nothing had struck such terror to his soul as her cold and dominating presence. Slowly, then, a thought detached itself from his piled up fear, just as a coil of smoke detaches itself from the piled up faggots of a bonfire and curls slowly aloft. He could be the instrument of her death! He could bring about the end of this woman whom he feared. He could now square accounts and revenge himself upon her. She was alone! He would tell it to the Grand Duke and the spies. They would put her out of the way. The reason that the Grand Duke and his friends were at Muhr's, he knew, was to be able to prove an alibi in the abducting of the Grand Duchess. But the others at the palace had failed! And he — the fool — was the only one who knew it. The fate of Russia and his beloved master rested with him. He tried to speak and tell him. He tried to whisper to him. He tried to whisper to the spies and Elizabeth Woronzov. But something lamed his will so that he could not. Something prevented him from sending the command from brain to mouth. He sat there futile and silent with the terrifying secret whirling helplessly in his brain. And she would hear all his master said. He knew it, but he could

not prevent it, because his mouth and his tongue refused obedience. Some paralyzing mental fluid crippled his will.

"With what can I serve you?" he heard the waiter address the question to Catherine Alexevna, while the Grand Duke and his friends were chatting foolishly on.

"What have you?" came the calm answer. The waiter repeated the bill of fare, adding the following delicacies which were not printed upon it: "Yellow honey from the Ural Mountains; flavored kraut from Serpuchov; moose berries from the Ukraine; young radishes from Mjasnov; *eierspeise* with cheese; caviare from Astrakan and the mouth of the Volga; bear's ham; roast moor fowl; smoked moose; reindeer tongues; stuffed boar's head."

"Caviare, and *sbiten* to drink. Wait! First bring me the papers. *The Petersburg News* and *The Free Hamburg Correspondent.*"

The waiter brought the papers and she became absorbed in reading, while the frightened dwarf stared at her with uncomprehending eyes. The calm, indifferent voice sent fresh terror to the soul of Narcissus because of its contrast with the unrestrainable tumult of his own soul.

It was this combination of savage and disciplined serenity that had made her such an object of fear and hatred to him. The prickly arrows of his malicious wit had been powerless to wound her. Like pebbles they rattled vainly against the impenetrable wall of her will.

"You must listen, your Royal Highness," Elizabeth Woronzov was declaring, but in a voice in which there was too much sweetness. "In case they have not been successful in making way with her to-night and she still lives, we must think out every possible precaution."

This jostled the dwarf's trembling tongue into foolish, misdirected speech.

"My master, do not talk of that here! My master —" began Narcissus, when the memory of two eyes of sapphire paralyzed his will, and his heavy head dropped back against the Grand Duke's leg, while his chin trembled with the weight of the words he longed to utter.

"Be still, you fool! Stop shaking!" giving him a masterful and admonitory kick. Narcissus made a mighty effort to break through the something that restrained him and speak. This was followed by the sickening sensation that this peculiar kind of mental impotence sent through his limbs. Greater and greater grew his realization of the importance of the discovery to his beloved master.

"We dare not leave a loophole of escape for her, your Highness," Countess Bruce was declaring. "Every day her power grows."

"Besides," continued Elizabeth Woronzov, "Orlov and my sister, the Princess Dashkov, are stirring up the people against you. Orlov is working in the army; Princess Dashkov among the courtiers and the scholars."

"But your sister I look for you to take care of."

"What can I do with her, your Highness? The Grand Duchess has promised to found some institution and make her the president. She does not care a fig about you or any one else. She cares about herself! If you cared as much about yourself, you would be better off."

"Your Royal Highness, if you do not do as the ladies suggest, you will be destroyed as completely as were your Swedish ancestors at Pultava."

"Stop shaking, Narcis, or I will knout you," he commanded, with an oath that made his hearers shudder.

"What is the matter with you! Your teeth are louder than the castanets of a Spanish dancer."

At these words the soldier figure at the next table that had been so absorbed in the papers felt carefully for the buckled sword. This furtive movement, too, the sensitive dwarf saw and understood.

"Right!" exclaimed the French spy. "The Grand Duchess is becoming the fashion. People are talking of her. I have heard that story about the fortune teller at least one dozen times the past week."

"What story is that?" inquired the Grand Duke. "I have not heard it."

The French spy wondered at the Russian manner of breaking up and distributing news so that the fragments fell just where the distributors wished them to fall.

"In Stettin, when she was a child, a fortune teller told her mother one day that he could see three crowns floating above her daughter's head. And the Russian marriage had not even been thought of then."

The waiter entered with the order of the Grand Duchess and arranged it carefully upon the table.

"And do you know what crowns they were?" asked Elizabeth Woronzov. "The crowns of Astrakan, Kasan and Moscow."

"Besides," added Countess Bruce, vivaciously and maliciously, "she deceives you. If for no other reason in the world, you ought to put her out of the way."

"I suppose she does deceive me," he agreed, meditatively, but without any anger. "But what is the use of all this conversation if she is dead, as you say she is? If she is dead and drowned in the Gulf of Finland, what is the use of this conversation? We might as well have kept on playing *kampis!* By the living God, Narcis, I will knout you to death, if you do not sit still!"

"But suppose she is not dead?" they chorused. "Suppose the spies failed?"

"But suppose she is?"

"Is it not best to be on the safe side?"

"Of course! Of course! And waste time in being miserable! That is what you call wisdom — being miserable. If you are not, you work hard to see if you can find something to make you miserable. I would rather be a happy fool — than so full of the two —"

"But your Royal Highness, you do not seem to understand how dangerous she will be in case my Prussian allies have failed to-night! The best diplomats in Europe who have lived at the court of Russia say that no woman of the day can compete with her."

"Be guided by their judgment," pleaded the French spy. "You know all that is needed at any time to overthrow the government here and bring about a change of rulers, is a few soldiers, two or three kegs of brandy, and a sack of gold."

"Stuff and nonsense! The next government of Russia will find me at the head. I shall be Peter III!"

"This is no time for boasting. But now be guided by the judgment of your friends," pleaded the French spy. "I have heard all sorts of things about her that you have not heard; heard them with my own ears — which I can trust — and so can you. You do not understand what sort of woman she is. You do not comprehend her. And, since you do not, you must listen to and follow those who do. They say that nothing but the extravagance of a Cæsar can compare with her entertainments this past summer and autumn at Oranienbaum. What have you known of them? Nothing! Is not this proof that you should first listen and then obey?

"Esterhazy said to me only yesterday — you know

what a philosophical student of character he is! —'Have you observed how the Grand Duchess [1] typifies Russia of the Eighteenth Century?' Then he explained. 'She has its primitive, undeveloped power; its splendor of soul, its daring, inquisitive and analyzing brain, and its luxurious, feline cruelty. Her temperament unites the richness, the elasticity, the fury of the Orient, with all that is most perniciously subtle in cultivated Europe. And, withal, she is still German; calm, clear headed and methodical.' Count Esterhazy is worth listening to, your Royal Highness."

"Besides, your Majesty," added Countess Bruce, "there is nothing that can affect her. She is a woman of iron. Did you ever see her grieved? Did you ever see her forget herself and say unwise things? Did you ever see her gratify her temper at expense to herself?"

"You are right," strengthened the French spy. "Nothing affects her. The ideas of the day amuse her, but they do not influence her. They are no more effective than the light of our winter moon upon the frozen wastes of this Finnish marsh."

"Yes, your Highness," chimed in Elizabeth Woronzov, "and she hears one thing and thinks something else. She is not swayed by what any one says. And she has no heart! There is not anything she cares for."

"The ladies are right, your Highness. Her power and popularity are growing. The clergy, the army, the people are becoming more and more fond of her."

"And the scholars, too — and the poets —" the ladies hastened to all.

"Well, suppose that it is true, what you have said? The world is at liberty to think anything it wishes now that she is dead. That cannot affect me. I cannot see how

[1] Quoted from a letter by Count Esterhazy.

what they thought of her before my Prussian friends disposed of her is going to injure me. Narcissus, my fool here, has really more sense than any of you. Here, we have broken up a good game of *kampis* to quarrel about what the world thinks of a dead woman, because to do so is what you call wisdom. Why, Narcis here would never be guilty of a thing like that! I wish now I had put her in a convent the way Peter the Great did with his wife."

"You do not seem to realize," said Elizabeth Woronzov, angrily, "that the plot against you is matured, that the parts are assigned, everything arranged —"

"No, I do not, because I cannot understand how a plot without a head is any more powerful or important than a person without a head. You just wait — all of you! I will show you a thing or two when I am Emperor. Then, they will see that I know something as well as she. One of the first things I am going to do is to make my wig-maker overseer of the Gobelin tapestry factory. Does it not stand to reason that a man who can make a good wig can make a good tapestry?"

"That is commendable," agreed the spies. "But we can decide that later. If you are to do this, and other things equally important and commendable,— among which is to hold your position in Russia, you must have the active support of the Prussian King. You might be set aside for your own son. That has happened before! You know the fate of Anna Leopoldovna. You have heard what became of the son of Peter the Great —"

The Grand Duke had paid no attention to the words of the spy, and broke out irrelevantly:

"I just cannot wait until the time comes for me to marry Elizabeth Woronzov. I will depose Bestushev-Rjumin and make your father head in everything. See if I do not!" turning toward her gayly.

"My royal master of Prussia will see that you do everything you wish to do — if you grant him now a slight favor. The siege of Berlin must be stopped —"

"Is that what they are after — those Russian dogs? Well, I think that I will stop that!"

"My royal master's capital is in danger. The Empress is too ill to think or care. When Bestushev-Rjumin learns the Grand Duchess is dead, he will curry favor with you. What he wants to do is reign, it does not matter through whom. You can bend him to your will. You can stop the siege."

The Grand Duke broke out into shrill and idiotic laughter:

"What a good joke on her! Te-he-he-he — What a good joke — to kidnap your own wife! Te-he-he-he — And yet how is that possible? How can one steal from one's self? There is something wrong about this! You have blundered. How am I going to tell her what a good joke I have played upon her if you have killed her? Why did you not think of that? I wish now that you had not done that! You see I wanted a chance to tell her!"

"Will it not give you just as much pleasure to send Bestushev-Rjumin to Siberia when the power is in your hands? That is a more important thing to do. Frederick the Great will help and stand by you."

"Will he? Did he say he would?"

"He did."

"Good! For me the will of Frederick the Great is the will of God!" He kissed the ring on his finger, that was so large that it was threatening to fall off.

"I suppose," he continued, "that we might have bribed the Grand Duchess instead of killing her. It would not

have been so wicked and it might have done just as well. I might have enjoyed it better."

"I think, perhaps, bribing might have been possible," agreed the French spy. "They say she borrowed fabulous sums from England. That shows money would have been acceptable. France could be her banker just as well. I knew her mother in Paris. She is a good deal like her — in double dealing. 'An apple never falls far from the tree.'"

"The French gentleman is right," laughed Countess Bruce, with her malicious tingling laughter. "There are not many doors that shut so tightly a golden hammer cannot open them."

"I agree with you, Countess."

"And Count Bestushev, could he not be bribed, too?"

"Could he!" exclaimed the Prussian, angrily. "He would sell the body of the Empress, if he could make up his mind how much to ask for it."

"I do not agree with you there," objected the Frenchman.

"Where his duty is concerned the Ghostly Chancellor is unapproachable. Among the men who are intriguing for fame and gold, he is the only one who works with an honest heart."

"You are wrong!" indignantly replied the Prussian. "Bestushev-Rjumin has the nature of a criminal. He will stop at nothing to gain an end —"

"Yes, yes, my good friend! But that end must be for Russia."

"Of course it would have been less work to bribe her," interrupted the Grand Duke, with his idiotic laughter, having paid no attention to the conversation. "But it would not have been so much fun. Te-he-he-he —

Think of kidnapping your own wife — and she did not know it! Te-he-he-he — How disappointed I am that I cannot tell her about it! I do not see why you did not arrange it so that I could tell her about it! What in the name of all the devils at once are your teeth chattering like that for, Narcissus, you fool? Stop it. Stop it, I say."

"You would not care anything about the joke you played upon her, if you knew what I saw a few nights ago."

"What did you see, Elizabeth Woronzov?"

"In the lightning that came with an autumn storm, I twice saw the Slavic Venus! That means change of rulers."

The Grand Duke began to tremble pitifully and turn white.

"The Slavic Venus! The Slavic Venus!"

"What is the matter? What are you afraid of?" inquired the French spy, in great surprise.

"Yes," joined in Countess Bruce, ready as ever to affect a situation unpleasantly, with her unrestrainable propensity for mischief making.

"And Elizabeth Petrovna has fallen into the strangest of superstitions! She remains for hours in contemplation before the statue of a heathen divinity which she has had brought from Kiev. It is that ancient Venus which her father, Peter the Great, loved. You cannot imagine her devotion! She talks to it. The ladies of her entourage are horror stricken. It is pagan idolatry!"

"You told me that just to frighten me, to make me unhappy. You know you did! That is the way you all do. I enjoy my enemies as well as I do my friends. They have this advantage, anyway: I can get away from them. But my friends are always with me."

"What is the matter with him? What does he mean?"

"He cannot help it," explained Elizabeth Woronzov. "It is in his blood. It comes from Peter the Great. He said that no one would rule Russia except a favorite of Venus. Was he not right? Think of him! The life he led! And our blessed Empress, Elizabeth Petrovna, was fabulously lovely in her youth. And what a life has been hers!"

The Prussian spy, mindful of his courtly training, bowed gallantly to Elizabeth Woronzov.

"I understand now how worthy you are to be the next Empress."

Her foolish little heart had already believed that it held a throne. The round eyes of Countess Bruce twinkled with malice.

"Cheer up, your Royal Highness!" urged the Frenchman. "The vision of Venus means that all will go well with you and your goddess of love — Mademoiselle Woronzov!"

"We must not waste time like this, in courtly speaking, my French friend. We must make plans for the possibility that our companions did not succeed in making way with the Grand Duchess."

"You seem to forget — all of you,—" interrupted the Grand Duke, pettishly, "that she has sins as well as other people."

"But there is no use in discussing sins, unless they are sins that are disapproved of. Hers, my dear Duke, your Russian people love."

"That's just the way you talk! Who could be expected to understand it? When she does wrong it's right. And when I do right it's wrong. How can any one be expected to keep his senses in a country where all things

are upside down? And the ridiculous part about this unpleasant discussion is that she is dead. Narcis, if you do not stop shaking and chattering like an ape, I will give you something to shake for!"

Again, the hand of the silent soldier sought the sword. A pause in the conversation followed, to be broken by shrill idiotic laughter, that made his hearers shudder, just as his helpless oath had done.

"Te-he-he-he — Is it not a good joke on her? To kidnap her! And when she did not know it. To abduct one's own wife! Not many men have done that! Te-he-he-he-he — But, if she is dead, you see I cannot tell her how I got the best of her. That is a mean shame, because she thinks that she is cleverer than I am. You did it on purpose to keep me from telling her about it."

"Come, come," urged Elizabeth Woronzov. "We must go back to the palace and dress for the second part of the ball.

"Oh! Oh! — is it not a good joke on her! Te-he-he-he — Come, Narcis, you shivering idiot — we are going now."

When they were outside and had come in sight of the palace, the Grand Duke paused without speaking and looked up at the great dark mass with the angry, flaring lights that deepened into blackness the space that surrounded it, making the serene stars farther away and fainter. He hesitated to enter it. He was frightened and trembling. As they approached a side door which connected directly with the private apartments of Elizabeth Woronzov, the frightened fool managed to find his tongue.

"My good master," he pleaded, "let me speak a word to you before we enter."

The Grand Duke looked at him questioningly.

"Wait a minute! Wait just a minute!" He paused again helplessly as if for breath, and then gasped, "The Grand Duchess — is not dead!"

"What — you fool? How do you know?" they called in chorus.

"That young soldier who came into Muhr's and whom we left sitting there — the one with the papers — was the Grand Duchess."

"Can you trust him?" queried the surprised spies.

"Perfectly! In a matter of this kind he could not be deceived. Then, that's what you were shaking for — and couldn't find your tongue! Now, my friends, do you not see how superior is the fool to the wise man? The fool finds of his own will what the wise man seeks for a lifetime. My French friend here — and my Prussian friend — were sent to Russia because of their wisdom. But only you — Narcissus, my fool — found out what they were sent to find."

"Shall we go back, your Highness?"

"What a question!" he thundered with an oath. "She must not elude me to-night. Go back! Go back at once! It will be easy. As soon as you enter bolt the door so that no one can come to her assistance."

"But we two cannot return," replied the spies. "It would cause suspicion for us to be seen there so quickly. There would be no apparent cause for such conduct."

"But she must be made way with to-night," insisted the Grand Duke.

"Never fear, your Highness," they answered. "You go on to the palace! We will go straight to the Dresden Woman's where our confederates are waiting. We will send two men from there to dispatch her quickly. We pledge you our word that within an hour she shall be beneath the water of the Neva."

"Do not blunder again! I warn you that it will not be well for you!"

During this conversation there was some of the tone of command in the voice of the Grand Duke that his elders had known in his imperial grandparent of Russia. But it was only for a pitiful instant, like a trembling shadow flung upon a wall.

"When your Highness enters the ballroom for the tableaux, do it with the assurance that things are as you wish."

No sooner had the Grand Duke and his party left the Coffee House than the Princess Dashkov entered. She was breathless and excited. The gold coins of her peasant's head dress jingled discordantly.

"How did you get away to come here?" questioned Catherine Alexevna.

"I did not. I just came."

"How are things outside? What is going on?"

"Excitement! Confusion! The machinery of intrigue is in full swing. The city is filled with spies and secret messengers of all nations."

"How is my double, Nicholas Murievich?"

Princess Dashkov paused a moment to weigh her words before replying.

"That is what I came to tell you. Two spies lured him from the ball by promising to give him proofs — which of course they did not have — that you are the daughter of Frederick the Great. I suppose by this time that he is — is —"

"Dead!"

"I suppose so. I could not save him. If I had, it would have meant death and disclosure for you. I did not give him your message. But there is no time to grieve, your Highness! We must get away at once.

The Prussians plan to kill you to-night — here. There is not a moment to lose. Orlov is waiting with a carriage on the other side of this building. We drove here with a speed that surpassed the wind. We must return as quickly. We must be in the palace and dressed for the last part of the ball, before the Prussian party can find out that they have abducted the wrong person. Then only will you be safe. They may be back here any moment to search for you. Come! Come!"

They left hurriedly by the little door on the left, which was the waiters' place of entrance, and made their way through the dim kitchen to the rear of the building where Orlov waited. They drove to the palace by a roundabout road, went in by a secret entrance, and made their way unseen by any one to the apartments of the Grand Duchess.

CHAPTER XI

CLOSE OF THE NIGHT

The women of the court had gone to change their costumes and the men to smoke, so the gilded spacious salon of the slim white candles and the garden of the tropic flowers were empty. Count Bestushev-Rjumin alone was in the great garden, dimmed slightly, but made more like a scene from fairyland by the floating smoke of candles, and fluttered over by gorgeous winged birds.

His face still wore its expression of triumph and elation and his sunken old eyes glowed cruelly. He walked about like a specter beneath the flowering trees, enjoying with fine appreciation the beauty of the setting, and the contrast which he himself presented in this vision of spring. He talked to himself according to his habit and enjoyed in solitude the first fruit of his triumph.

"How I have enjoyed life, delicately, sensitively, as a gourmand sips his wine! There is nothing that has not given me pleasure. I have loved clouds and flowers and the perfume of fruit. I have even found beauty in the vague, soft sadness of the north. For it is true that sadness permeates the north, just as prayer permeates the Orient. Sadness falls softly with its soft falling snows. It rises softly with the pale and gentle mists from its mysterious waters. It touches one fleetingly, intangibly, regretfully, with the wind of summer. It floats over its murmuring waters like a spirit trying to manifest itself again. It drops down from high, slow-circling bird wings. It vibrates from its dim, mist-laden moon. It

shivers upon its sparce, gray-green grasses. Even its flowers are pearled over with tears. The rain, too, I have thought is sadder here than elsewhere. And yet in it all I have found beauty.

"I wish that I could have lived many lives! One life is not enough for any man. I might have been a creative artist, I have loved beauty so.

"'My heart beats with greater violence than the hearts of the Corybantes,' says Plato in *The Banquet.* Just so has my own heart beaten at the outspread beauty of nature. But I have hidden my joy from the world to ward off its hatred. The world does not persecute the weak, or the poor, or the humble with such bitter pleasure as it persecutes the joyous. There are rooms within my heart that are furnished for me alone. No one has seen within them. The eyes of the world are death dealing. Never let them look within your heart! I am old and bent and unlovely. No one would think to look at this dried up, ugly old man that the copper-colored moons of spring sway within his heart like lilies in some Syrian garden. No one would think that the pale, mist-floating moons of late autumn rise there, like the gray iris, that ghost of a perished joy. In my heart there are bits of the beauty of all the world. It is a kaleidoscope of joyous memory, turning and showing me changing pictures at my will.

"There are mornings when I was young — long, long ago! — in the sweet, fresh English country, when dew glistened on the roses and the skylark sang. There are nights in dim, Flemish cities, whose souls are mysterious bells that call across mysterious waters. There are autumns at the vintage season in merry villages of the Rhine, and dance and laughter. There are moonlight nights in Little Russia when the nightingale made music

and the steppe was a silver sea. There are black and lonely midnights in a cloister that looks down upon the White Sea's frozen waves, paling slowly to the pallid desolation of a polar dawn, in that cloister where Ivan the Terrible went to pray. A man is just as great as the stored-up joy of his heart. As the miner separates gold from the dirt, so should man separate joy from the dirt of memory and of living, and preserve to make rich his soul. It is joy that painted the wings of these tropic birds that flutter above my head. It is joy that made lovely the blossoms of these oleander and orange trees. And it is joy that created this luxurious atmosphere of pleasure where the petted children of Russia are playing to-night. Joy is God's greatest gift.

"I am old. I am hideous to look upon. I am shriveled and twisted by the years. I often wonder what this soul of mine can be doing in this old man's body. I feel as if I ought to look like the picture of an old man in his youth! But there is something of the spring still dwelling in my heart.

"I have loved beauty and science and art and power instead of women. I have found them better worth the loving. Beauty and power and knowledge are perfected things. While women — Indeed I have agreed often with Mahomet, who said that they had no soul. But Mahomet did not love them any better than I. It may be that love when it is great and genuine is a philosopher's stone that possesses the power of turning common things to gold. To love them, perhaps, would mean to find them divine. Love is a great maker of divinity."

He paused in his walk and his monologue and the spectral candle smoke focussed its center of mystic whirling motion about him. Thus might he look if he were disembodied.

"Life! Life! It is as beautiful and as wonderful and as unstable as the smoke."

He began again his restless wandering beneath the flowering trees and his mood changed to one of contemplation of the present and its demands. His eyes lost the inspired look of the dreamer and became subtle and cruel and sharp pointed.

"To-night, I hope, will mark the last of Great Prussia! If Frederick and I could live long enough, I would teach him to enjoy the safety of insignificance. He will not try again to bait the Russian bear. Not so bad, Bestushev! Not so bad!

"It is his own daughter (So they say! But I have never believed it) who will give the signal for his retirement. Through her I will send him my final word. Not so bad, Bestushev! Not so bad! But I shall miss him! He has been a satisfactory enemy. An enemy worthy of me! He has appreciated what I have done; its subtlety, its artistry. Not many could do that! Next to being able to create one's self is the ability to appreciate the things that other people create. I almost love mine enemy — as Holy Writ commands.

"Ought I not? He is the only man in Europe who can measure me. I should love him as a coquette loves her mirror. Is he not the mirror of my success? Perhaps, God made him merely to mirror my greatness. I can truthfully say that he has been a delightful enemy! Appreciative, firm, ready, dangerous, daring! He has been an ideal background for my genius.

"Yes, yes, he has been a delightful enemy. If I only could have taught him to jest with death — to mix humor with crime, he would almost have equalled me. Almost! As it is, I shall miss him. Well, well — Some people

live and some people philosophize about life. Frederick has philosophized too greatly. Well, well —

" He ought to see his so-called daughter, ought he not? Ha! ha! ha! — He thinks that she is still just a little German girl. Well, well — not exactly. I should say not exactly. Well, well — between the little Sophie of Zerbst whom he used to know and the Grand Duchess of Russia, Catherine Alexevna, there is a difference which even Frederick, my friend, could see. Well, well — and I am the cause of it! I educated her. I made her as I wished. Good material though. Well, well —

" Frederick thought that if diplomacy and gold failed he would use force, did he not? He thought he would make things as he wished them — being the earthly representative of God. What a fool I made of him! Ha! ha! ha! I would exile to Siberia the greenest fledgeling under me who dared to bungle. That is why I sent her to Muhr's on the Morskoi. The old Russian bear only shuts one eye when he goes to sleep. Ha! ha! ha! I shall have to jest gently — very gently — with Frederick about that. I shall tell him not to despair. The only time to do that with reason is when one is dead, because life is a thing of change. I shall suggest to him that there is really no cause for disappointment, because expectation and realization are seldom on speaking terms.

" Yet,"— and for a moment his face bleached with the quick pallor of fear —" what if she should fail me? Ah! — my blessed master," looking at the medallion portrait of Peter the Great that hung suspended from its chain of jet, " to-night the future of the country you loved depends upon the fickle will of a woman and a frail old man. I feel very old to-night. I am old —

" But she will not fail me! " The battle tempered will that had never met failure reasserted itself. " She

is not fickle. She is not changeable. Her mind is cold and critical. Besides, she has the cunning and the dependable calm of women who have no imagination."

In a few moments the Grand Duchess entered the Winter Garden and crossed to where Count Bestushev-Rjumin was standing. She wore a white silk coat that covered and concealed her body. A white veil was wound about her face and throat.

"Did you call me, Count Bestushev?"

"No, not exactly, Catherine Alexevna. I merely wished that you were here. But you must retire before the others come. I do not wish anyone to see you before the tableaux. The Prussian party must think that they succeeded and that you are dead. I am counting upon the disabling effect of surprise upon them."

He looked at her fixedly before continuing. It was evident that he had some influence over her of long standing that might not be explained.

"I am glad that you have come, Catherine Alexevna. We have need of each other to-night — you and I. I need your support."

"Have I ever refused it?"

"No — no — of course not! And I know that you paid no attention to those silly stories of Frederick the Great."

"What of them? Are they true?"

"Hm! Hm! Well — Well! — It was the gossip of the courts when you were a baby. But of whom do they not gossip? Everyone brought up at court has several fathers. Should not a Grand Duchess of Russia have just as many as the rest?"

"You jest, Count Bestushev."

" That you should be influenced by such silly stories is subject for jest."

" But my support? What do you mean? "

" This. If her Majesty lives the week out, I shall be sent into exile. If she does not live the week out and the Grand Duke comes into power — for even a little while — my fate is the same — exile. The Grand Duke cannot — must not — reign. If he did, your life and mine would be at stake. There would be no talk, then, of exile. You must seize the power and put him out of the way. Put him in a safe place where there is — no return! Then, recall me! When I am gone, the fate of Russia will depend on you. I give it into your hands just as Peter the Great gave it into mine."

" But the crime, Count Bestushev — the awful crime that will be upon my soul! "

" There will be no crime! Self-preservation is a law of nature. It is your life against the Grand Duke's. Choose! Your visit to Muhr's to-night proved that to you."

" Why is it necessary — so often — that crime should be the accessory of power? "

" A law of nature with which you and I have nothing to do, Catherine Alexevna. A law for whose continuance our approval is not necessary.

" The individual is of no consequence to nature.

" Use your mind! Use your mind! That is the thing to do.

" To go to an excess of virtue is just as blameworthy as to go to an excess of evil, because in either case balance — which is the power of importance — is upset. Thought, Catherine Alexevna, is frequently successful in banishing the fears of fancy. You would really be a

greater murderess if you did not kill him. Do you understand?"

Catherine Alexevna looked up at him with fascinated eyes. The old mental magic had reasserted its power over her.

"Yes, Count Bestushev, I understand."

"Great virtues, Catherine Alexevna, carried to excess in a sovereign are really dangerous. A sovereign must be impersonal and live for universal goals. The important thing is to know what is best for the people, and then pursue it relentlessly."

"No woman is more brave than I. It seems to me now, when I hear your voice again, that I have never feared."

"That is what I like to hear. You see the undeveloped possibilities of Russia. I have taught you to see. I have given you the power to project yourself impersonally. We are living in a difficult age, Catherine Alexevna. The classic world is dying. Its beliefs, its ideals are breaking up like the ice in our Russian rivers in spring. A new and a very different civilization — where all things will change — is right at hand — just over the crest of the century. I feel the instability of the time in which we live. I can catch faintly the roar of that new, modern world which will destroy all that I have known and loved. And yet I wish that I could live to see it.

"Ah! Catherine Alexevna, that I were young with you — that I could live on and on, not for myself alone, but for Russia — and for you! That I could live to be a part of the great Russia of the days to come!

"Perhaps death is not what we think it after all. Perhaps we go on and on, and cast off body after body

and are young again. That is the great tragedy — to have to die — the great tragedy, just when one has learned enough to live. That I could live on! That I could throw off age like a garment and be young again with you!"

The glowing salon beyond ached with the sad emptiness of regret. The tropic birds looked at them with their jewel-bright, penetrating eyes. The vibrant silence weighed heavily upon the flowers. But the mood vanished as quickly as it came, and happiness swept back again to vitalize the silence.

"You will live on, Great Chancellor, in me. Are not the souls of us as one? Besides, who knows what death is? It may be an ever present and more powerful existence not made visible in flesh."

"Yours will be a great life, my love! And I may be living it with you in the double life of the soul. You embrace in yourself the world that is passing and the modern world that is at hand. You have the physical strength of antique races, and the trained and discriminating senses of to-day. I will make you superior to disintegrating change by something that I possess here," tapping his brow significantly with his finger. "You will be the last of the great past that had the daring and the inclination to live. And in living you will symbolize Russia."

He paused to measure the effect of his words upon her, and to enjoy critically the moment's triumph, and the night with its fairy setting. And he thought, too, how characteristic it was, that neither love nor youth with its seductive charm, nor pity or kindness, could move her like the cold things of the intellect.

"But to-night, Catherine Alexevna, you must give your

pledge to the people. It cannot be deferred! The moment has come. Your costume and Princess Dashkov's are in your dressing room. Everything is ready!"

As he watched her walk away, he noticed that her figure had that appearance of dominance that his presence seldom failed to give.

The others reëntered gayly in court costume. The George Salon filled rapidly with a brilliant and eager assemblage which overflowed into the Winter Garden.

Count Bestushev-Rjumin stood silent and motionless, alone in one corner, like a black and ominous bird of prey, looking scornfully on.

Count Ivan Shuvalov, marshal of the court, entered and inspected carefully the dress and the coat of the Russians. Subanski, Razumovsky, two spies and Gregory Orlov were to the front of the Garden.

"What in the world is he doing, the marshal of the court?" queried the Prussian spy, with ill-restrained eagerness.

"Yes, what is he doing?" echoed the French spy. "Whatever it is, it seems to concern the Russians alone."

"He is finding out," explained Subanski, "if their costumes are new or old."

"How can he? What do you mean?" urged the Prussian.

"Is not that one of your Russian jests, which you say no one can understand?" the Frenchman remembered to retaliate.

"Our blessed Empress," explained Orlov, "in order that her court may be the most splendid in Christendom, issued an ukase that each costume worn at court be stamped with the date of its make. They are permitted to be worn only a certain number of times."

"Extraordinary! Most extraordinary!"

"It is not extraordinary, my French friends."

"You do not really mean it, do you?"

"Of course I mean it!" affirmed Subanski. "In this way, you see, no one can wear anything that is old. We are sure to be in fashion. Very important I consider it."

"It would be a good thing," broke in Orlov, "for you Prussians to imitate."

"I should think it would," agreed Subanski. "They say your Emperor never owned but one state costume in his life, and that he is wearing it now."

"What was it he said about clothes, Gregory Orlov? Tell me!" begged Razumovsky, one trembling old hand behind his ear.

The marshal of the court approached Razumovsky and began to make ready for inspection.

"Do you wish to insult me? I will not permit it. I never wore a suit more than thrice. It makes me weep."

The foolish, supersensitive old beau pulled out one of the new foulard handkerchiefs and put it to his eyes affectedly.

"You did get one, did you not, Razumovsky?"

"I went to your importer, Subanski! Think what an honor for him — to be visited by the first gentleman of Russia! I drove there and back just as fast as I could. I put the subject before him this way. I said: 'The blessed Empress may die at any moment. Therefore, I have driven from court to visit you — and at this hour. I would be the chief mourner, would I not? How would it look for a man occupying an exalted position like mine to weep upon an old-fashioned handkerchief? The court would be disgraced.' He was touched, of course. Anyone would have been! In addition, he was so moved

by my eloquence that he gave me enough to last through to-night — and the funeral."

"Good for him!"

"A ball and a funeral are, Razumovsky, the two most important state events in Russia."

"Of course! And they both ought to be well dressed, ought they not, Gregory Orlov? I knew that Gregory Orlov would agree with me."

The Grand Duke entered with Elizabeth Woronzov, followed by Countess Bruce. Their faces wore expressions of triumph. The bearing of the Grand Duke was almost regal. He felt sure he was rid of Catherine Alexevna, and within reach of the freedom he desired. The news had secretly made its way among the guests that favored Prussia and Peter the Duke, that the Grand Duchess had been spirited away and that she would never return. The air was electric with suppression of the secret. The Grand Duke and Elizabeth Woronzov took commanding positions and the guests made obeisance to her as they entered, just as if she were the reigning Empress. They stood purposely near Count Bestushev-Rjumin that he might be forced to hear and see. Elizabeth Woronzov was eager to have revenge upon this old man whom she hated not only on her own account, but because he stood in the way of her uncle's political advancement. She could not resist the pleasure of an irritating remark in this supposed hour of her triumph.

"How handsome these Holstein uniforms are to-night, Count Bestushev-Rjumin! Their bright colors look like a flower garden, do they not?"

"Greatly! Just like spring flowers, which, unfortunately, wither quickly."

"What do you suppose he meant by that?" whispered a Prussian spy, quick to take alarm.

"Hush! Keep still!" whispered back his comrade. "Nothing — probably."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your appearance to-night, Countess Woronzov," flattered Razumovsky, bowing low. "You are lovely enough to be an Empress," continued the old beau, reckless of truth. "Is she not, Subanski?"

"None of us are such a good judge of Empresses as you are, Razumovsky."

The Grand Duke attempted an air of dignity, "I consider myself to be!"

"I congratulate you, Duke, upon your taste!" retorted the witty Pole, bowing low with mock humility.

"But where is the Grand Duchess?"

The question exploded a bomb of silence. No one dared to lift an eye for fear it might betray the intelligence within. Count Bestushev-Rjumin alone surveyed the scene indifferently, with a white and malevolent face. At length, the Grand Duke broke the silence whose weight he could not bear. But his voice was unsteady and they knew his words were false.

"The Empress summoned her. She will not return to the ball."

This foolish statement betrayed his complicity to the opposing party.

"And my sister, the Princess Dashkov, where is she?" questioned Elizabeth Woronzov, with something like terror in her voice, and an equal lack of insight.

"Let me see," said Count Bestushev-Rjumin, seeing an opportunity to vex and confuse her. "Your sister, the Princess Dashkov, wore a black domino for the masking, did she not?"

"Black domino!" Elizabeth Woronzov turned pale and tears sprang to her little round eyes.

"A black domino! Did you hear that, your Royal Highness?"

Subanski, who enjoyed the discomfiture of other people, caught the drift of the conversation and helped the Chancellor.

"I think she went away with the Grand Duchess. I remember seeing her. They entered the grand march together and slipped out by one of the little gilt doors at the end of the George Salon."

Elizabeth Woronzov's little fat face looked more than frightened.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered in a voice that everyone could hear. She had never seen any point in her life.

"Keep still! Keep still, can you not?" admonished Countess Bruce, with the canny Scotch wit which she had inherited from a canny Scotch ancestor.

"See my handkerchief, Elizabeth Woronzov," chatted Razumovsky, irrelevantly. "It is the latest thing from Paris. This is the way to display it," explained the foolish old beau, forgetting his years.

Elizabeth Woronzov pulled herself together and tried to forget her fear.

"And my shoes, too, Count Alexis Razumovsky!" replied Elizabeth Woronzov, taking the cue and making a fresh effort to conceal her emotion.

"The very latest from Paris! Are not the feathers beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Beautiful! Are they not, Gregory Orlov? They make me weep for joy. That is the way that beauty always affects me."

"And mine, too! See!" exclaimed Countess Bruce, thinking the subject both fortunate and safe.

"What do you think of them, Chancellor?" asked

Elizabeth Woronzov, with a brave effort to be gay and natural.

"Well, well — they do become you. And yet I have always connected feathers with a certain bird which I will not name."

"The insolence!"

"The insolence!" chimed the fawning spies, trying to pierce with angry looks that mask of death, that had again resumed its white rigidity.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the Grand Duke, remembering his newly acquired power, and that his position was no longer secondary.

"I thought, your Highness, that my answer was clear. People seldom ask for a second one. Do you?"

"I will teach you to have respect for my opinion, Count Bestushev —"

"Wait! Wait!" whispered Elizabeth Woronzov. "In a few hours he will be glad enough to apologize to you — and to me, too, for that matter."

"Is his power so great?" asked a startled spy, in a low voice, to his neighbor. "Is he the ruler here?"

"Did you ever!" exclaimed the cracked and senile treble of Razumovsky.

"Did you ever! I never said things like that, even when the blessed Empress was perfectly well. And think what a position I held!"

"What do you think of his assurance? What can it mean?" whispered the uneasy Prussian spy again, who felt that all was not well. "Do you suppose he has tricked me at the last? Do you suppose he could be brave and insolent like this, if he knew the end would come within the hour?"

They glanced timidly sidewise at that sphinxlike, ter-

rible face which they felt would determine their fate. There was nothing to be read upon it. The Ghostly Chancellor resembled a slender statue of ivory and jet.

Two heralds entered with gilt, flower-wreathed trumpets. They advanced side by side to the center of the George Salon, where they paused and lifted their trumpets.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. Members of the court. The tableaux! The tableaux! The Garden will now be made open to the people."

The front of the Garden was flung back, showing more freely now the streets beyond, and the breathless autumn night with its high, pale, scattered stars, and the frosty glitter of the Milky Way. A crowd of indistinguishable, dark, moving bodies were seen, with now and then the accented whiteness of a face or a garment. As far as the eye could carry there swayed a black, murmuring mass of humanity, trying to push forward eagerly for a better view of this royal revelry.

The movable stage was brought to the front of the George Salon. The people pressed forward to catch glimpses of the setting and the gorgeous costumes of this first masked ball of the Russian winter. The curtain went up on the tableau. It disclosed the Princess Dashkov representing Herodias. She held out toward the people a silver tray. But upon this tray the head was missing.

A murmur rippled across the courtier crowd. The stupidest among them felt the approaching crisis. The air was electric with suppressed emotion. Even the undisciplined crowd instinctively turned frightened eyes in search of that well known figure of jet and ivory, which they felt had turned loose one of his mysterious, death

dealing plots, which no one was skilful enough to check. After a silence which was louder and more ominous than sound, they shouted:

"A head she wants. She wants a head. Down with the royal supporter of Prussia! Down with him! Down with him!"

Terrified silence followed this first explosion of sentiment. Little by little, into the minds behind all the eager, shining eyes there had filtered the comprehension that the Ghostly Chancellor was telling his faithful Russian followers—telling them emphatically, artistically—but without incriminating words, that the Grand Duke must die.

Before they could recover the power of speech, his thin, cruel, old voice was heard saying to Subanski, the Polish Adonis, "You were right, Subanski. A ball and a funeral are the most important state events in Russia. Especially, if the funeral happen to be a royal one."

"The second tableau!" announced the sweet, youthful voices of the heralds through their flower-wreathed trumpets. Again, the curtain went up. This time it disclosed Catherine Alexevna representing the Slavic Venus, who was likewise goddess of the avenging lightning. But what a change had taken place in her! Her face was of marble, pallid and stern. The eyes were not the beautiful tender eyes of a woman in her youth. They were hard, bright gems. The mouth was a faint line of red. The body had lost womanly grace and softness, and attained the rigidity of stone. The features were thinner and more sharply lined. The resemblance to the statuette that had been brought back from the Pregel was startling in its vividness. It was the face of a woman whose heart some destructive thought had killed. It was the face of cruelty!

Her unbound hair fell over her shoulders in rich dis-

order. Upon her head, rising evenly from ear to ear like a half-moon, was a blazing disk of blue gems a foot in height. Her body was covered smoothly with a tight sheath of silver upon which were raised figures representing animals after the manner of old Russian embroidery. The garment left the shoulders and arms uncovered, and billowed at the feet into a piled up whiteness that resembled the foam of the sea. In one hand, upraised in the attitude of one who delivers a curse, was a disk of blazing light.

In the hush that followed the curtain's going up, Count Bestushev-Rjumin stepped forward and announced:

"The Slavic Venus! The faithful and ancient protectress of Russia!"

The crowd yelled excitedly: "Russia for the Russians! Long live the Grand Duchess!"

The condition of the Grand Duke was truly pitiful. Surprise and fear overwhelmed him alternately. As his little timid eyes glanced toward the great, black, swaying mass outside for a possible hope of escape, he saw a bright, falling star go speeding to its death down the northern night. He knew that it was all over with him. It would not come to-day nor to-morrow. But come it would. It was just a question of time. And he knew that he would not have either the energy or the courage to escape. The decree had gone forth. And that bright falling star made him feel that fate had signed it across the night.

In his pitiful, little heart he regretted not power, or fame, or the glittering throne. None of these! They were ages away from him now that the end had come. Instead, he regretted with an inexpressibly childish love, the peaceful mountain farms of Sweden and the little wet valleys that were green as an emerald.

The frightened spies were unable to guess how the tables had been turned upon them. They escaped among the crowd as best they could, knowing that to be found in Petersburg meant death. Some of them succeeded and hired themselves driven speedily to where a black ship still waited upon the tideless Gulf. With the same mysterious and inexplainable rapidity the bright flower garden of Holstein uniforms faded away. Subanski, who enjoyed the situation, waved his elegant, jewelled hands triumphantly and called with boyish glee,

"Down with the enemies of Russia!"

The crowd took up the call and varied it to suit themselves. A forest of black arms was lifted toward the frosty pallor of the sky.

"Hail to the Slavic Venus! Hail to the restorer of old Russia! Hail! Hail!"

Count Bestushev-Rjumin signaled to Orlov. Orlov advanced to the foot of the stage and offered his hand to the Grand Duchess. Together they walked into the Winter Garden, while the members of the court and the crowd fell upon their knees in attitudes of superstitious worship and adoration. When they approached the edge of the Garden the crowd shouted excitedly: "Hail to the Slavic Venus! Hail to the restorer of old Russia. Hail! Hail!"

Here, Count Bestushev-Rjumin met them, bowed reverently, and then put up one thin, old, trembling hand to command silence.

"Gentlemen, members of the court, and men of Russia, within the hour I send command to our conquering army to begin the siege of Berlin!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried the crowd.

"Long live the Slavic Venus!"

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST DAYS OF AN EMPEROR

"It looks like the resurrection, doesn't it?" laughed Peter III, genuinely pleased. "Come here, Elizabeth Woronzov, and see!" he called gayly. With old Marshal Münnich, who had just returned from Siberia, they were standing by a window of the Diamond Salon in the New Palace.

"I have resurrected the exiled dead of Siberia — and the mines, too — to have them here to celebrate to-day — the big day — the signing of peace with Prussia. It is a shame — a miserable shame — the way the Russians plundered and destroyed Berlin! But I'll make up for it — the best I can.

"Look at old Biron there! — the Courlander! He resembles a sick dog, doesn't he? Big head and old shaking feet? He has been in Siberia twenty years. And when he went he was an Emperor — or just the same as one. A change — that!" shaking his head thoughtfully.

"And there's old L'Estoque — that old French devil — the physician of my blessed aunt, Elizabeth Petrovna. Look at him, Elizabeth Woronzov! My — how the torture deformed him! He can hardly walk! Watch his legs twist and jerk!" he exclaimed, with energy, altogether absorbed in the sight. Elizabeth Woronzov had no interest in the scene outside the window. What did anything matter but herself? She could not turn

her mind from her increasing honors, her ladies-in-waiting — in short, her future.

"I'll tell you what they look like, Münnich!" continued the Emperor, still intent upon his fancy —"these people I've brought back. They look like the wrecked fragments of some earlier polar world. I like to look at them. But no one else ever wants to do anything I want to do. I've a fondness for graveyards and the dead." He paused, turned from the window, and began to limp about the room in his peculiar manner.

He was intent as usual upon some inner thought.

"The reason I like the dead, Münnich, is because I've lived so long on good terms with them," he went on meditatively, pulling out his short, white, German pipe and lighting it. "I've got accustomed to them. When I lived in Sweden, one day one of the courtiers threw a big, red apple into the room where I sat with my tutor. It rolled to my feet. I bent to get it to eat. My tutor got ahead of me. He threw it to my dog to play with. The dog stuck his teeth into it, and in an hour he died. I have always thought it was wise for me to keep on good terms with them — the dead. What do you think?"

There was no answer to this strange and uncanny soliloquy. It was not within the present range of Elizabeth Woronzov's thinking. And what may have passed through old Marshal Münnich's mind he deemed best not to express. The Emperor went back to the window.

"There's that old bear, Lomonossov, and his satellites, Von-Visin and Dershawin,— and the young lieutenant of the Ismailov Guards, Novikov. My, how they hate this celebration in honor of Prussia! He! he! he! How they hate it. He! he! he! But they have got to pretend they like it. I'll bet when I came to the throne they tore

up patriotic poems in honor of plundering Berlin."

"I think, your Majesty," ventured old Marshal Münnich, "that this celebration in honor of Prussia was not wise. It displeases the army. It displeases the people. You know how the cost of living has increased. The poor are starving."

"Who is Emperor, if I am not?"

"I know — your Majesty. It is only six months since that Christmas day Elizabeth Petrovna died. You are still young to the throne. It is wisest to conciliate the people first and win their good will. Make yourself popular, instead of going against them like this. Do not oppose their will. You always lose by doing it. I was one of the councillors of your grandfather. I am devoted to the Romanoffs. You know from me you hear only that which is for your good; so you can bear with me because I am an old man."

"That's what I brought you back for, Münnich. In my heart I know you are the only one in the lot I can trust," he explained, impulsively, giving words to one of those shrewd *apercus* that from time to time brightened his folly.

"I, for my part, do not see what difference anybody's opinion makes," declared Elizabeth Woronzov, with her usual hauteur. She had grown noticeably stout and somewhat coarse. On her short unlovely body shone the gems of that imperial beauty, Elizabeth Petrovna.

Peter III had changed physically, too, since the demise of the Empress. Six months of unrestrained dissipation had made fearful inroads upon his frail body. He was hollow cheeked. His skin looked gray and shriveled. He had aged as if by magic. More than ever he had the appearance of a dressed up ghost. Today he was wearing a heavily braided uniform of blue,

tight breeches of white leather, and long, shining black boots. Around his neck hung the decoration of the Black Eagle, recently bestowed by the Prussian king. His small, thin, fragile hands were all but hidden beneath gems. The manner of this bizarre combination of madman, dreamer, artist, and penetrator of hidden thoughts, who sat upon a throne, had likewise changed. As a child he had been sick, and abused. As a man he had been dwarfed by restraint and depraved by evil companions. Now, as autocrat of the Russians, he saw a world bowing at his feet. The change was too great. Few could withstand it.

We can scarcely conceive to-day of the grandiose self-glorification of the Czars in that city, hastily improvised for their European début, young in the world, and so far removed from the cities of cultivated Europe that recognized standards were unfelt and disregarded. The age, the conditions, conspired to magnify them, until they looked like figures on lonely hill tops seen through fog. And the great, untamed spaces of their scarcely mapped Muscovy, made eye and mind dizzy and incompetent to judge, swayed always by the vertigo of distance.

"I'll make the world take notice of me! I'll make the world open it eyes!" his sharp, nasal voice was heard saying, while he hopped about nervously in his peculiar birdlike manner.

Outside the window the streets were crowded with people who were celebrating, by his order, the three days' holiday beginning June the ninth.

"But first I'm going to enjoy myself for a month! I've worked hard lately. I'm tired. I'm going to throw off care and be happy. Haven't I the same right to rest as other people, I'd like to know? I want to finish, for one thing, the second volume of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

My new violin is coming from Italy — and some music with it. I want to enjoy them. They may be here today."

"Your Majesty," began Marshal Münnich, "take my advice and arrange time for enjoyment later. The thing for your Majesty to do is to go to Moscow and be crowned. That assures your throne — with the people. Nothing is safe until then."

"Do you suppose, Münnich, that I'm going to have that wife of mine, *Madame La Ressource,* crowned?" he questioned in a voice of anger. "Well, I guess not. It's the last thing in the world I'd think of doing."

Elizabeth Woronzov looked up at him and smiled.

"Make your throne secure," advised the old man. "Then you can do as you like. Everything will come, if you see to that."

"No — I've got a lot of other things to do first," stubbornly insisted Peter III, upon whom reason and argument made no impression. "I'll make Russia look up! You watch me. Here's what I've given orders for already — this week. I'm going to confiscate the lands of the Greek church. I'll show the priests they are not such a power!" He chuckled in pleased anticipation.

"Then I'll take the pictures out of the cathedrals and put up good-looking German pictures, which I will select myself. I am going to erect a Lutheran church in Petersburg, and a Lutheran chapel in Oranienbaum. The Greek chapel there I'll tear down. You ought to see the letters of protest I received. One from the Metropolitan of Moscow. I'll teach him to protest to me!"

"That is not wise, your Majesty. Let the faith of your people alone. That is something no monarch can change. There are other things more important, your Majesty," he added significantly.

"What's more important than religion, I'd like to know?" he retorted, ready for an unpleasant argument.

Elizabeth Woronzov looked pleased at what she considered the imperial will.

"Besides, Münnich, I'm going to issue an ukase doing away with church of state. In my land religion shall be free."

He paused by one of the windows to smell pleasurably the sweet air of spring. Fragrant birch tree leaves shook outside in the light. Blue mist hung over the distant water.

The joy at recall from exile was changing to sadness in the mind of the old Marshal at this interview with the new Emperor. He realized the unbridgeable chasm that lay between the mind of this irresponsible man and the glorious destiny to which he was born.

Involuntarily his eyes swept the gorgeous walls of the Diamond Salon where they were sitting, glittering walls, which framed incongruously this ungainly phantom who was ruler.

"These Russian soldiers who put on airs, I'm teaching to mend their manners," he went on to explain to the recently returned Münnich. "I'm going to dress the Preobrashensky Regiment and the Ismailov Guard in German uniforms and send them into the interior — to stay. My! — how they will hate to leave Petersburg! In their place I will put my Holstein Guard. My cousin, Prince George, who has just arrived, I have made commander-in-chief of the army."

"Oh — your Majesty — don't do a thing like that!" begged the old man, his voice trembling. "The army is already angry over war with Denmark. They say it is no war of theirs. The Russian army — you must remember — has never been the servile mass other armies

have been. They have exerted a mind and will of their own. They have had independent influence upon the destiny of the nation. They will mutiny!"

"The order has gone, Münnich. They know it now. You will see how they bow their heads. I'll make them suffer for the way they treated me — and their airs!"

"Your Majesty, there is not any place in life for revenge. Believe me! I learned this in a quarter of a century of exile. And, especially, your Majesty, there is no place for revenge for you — of all men. Conciliate is what you must do. Conciliate everyone — everyone. Times are bad now. Your people are maddened by scarcity of money and food. They are murmuring every day against the extravagance of the court. In the article in the last *Petersburg Gazette* which described the food situation, the high price, the suffering of the people, there was another article followed it — placed by the side of it for the sake of effectiveness. It said the blessed Empress — your aunt — left sixteen hundred royal robes, and hundreds of pairs of boots and shoes. It said the vegetables for her table cost fifty-six thousand rubles yearly, and the fowls fifty thousand rubles. That was printed to make trouble, your Majesty! Believe me, the army will mutiny before it will go to Denmark and there fight under the Prussian King, who is hated by your entire country."

Peter III, as was his habit, paid no heed to the wise words of the old man. As usual, he progressed wildly with his fixed idea.

"And I am going to throw Russian books out of the library. I'll show these Russians who made so much fun of me what I'll do! That old fool Lomonosov I just saw go by the window here thinks I will give money for his mosaic glass factory. He'll see! I'll have the thing

burned. He! he! he!" His foolish laughter glittered sharply across the splendid room, as a fresh thought of revenge touched his brain.

"I've decreed that Russian priests take off robes and wear short black coats — and top hats —. How they will look! O my! O my!" bending double with laughter. "And I'm going to change the name of every regiment. I'm going to give them German names. How that will hurt them! He! he! he!

"You know how I used to dress my lead dolls, Münnich? No, you do not! You were not here. Well, that's the way I am going to dress and undress the Russian people for my amusement. I'll be Emperor with a will!"

"Your Majesty — your Majesty —" replied Marshal Münnich, rising to his feet and trembling with complex emotions. "I beg your Majesty to be guided by me. You are new to the throne. You are inexperienced in ruling. I was one of the valued friends of your grandfather. Listen to me!"

There was a note in the old man's voice that touched Elizabeth Woronzov, dull as she was, and made her for a moment fear there was danger ahead. Could it be that that, which seemed so near it was practically within reach, might elude her?

"Your Majesty — there is without doubt a plot on foot to dethrone you. You have deliberately angered the army, the church — two powerful political bodies."

"What difference does anybody make? Am I not Emperor?"

"But Emperors have been dethroned." In the gravity of the danger that threatened, the old man was forgetting the servility due his august listener.

"Your Majesty, only yesterday the French ambassa-

dor, M. de Breteuil, received a personal letter from his sovereign — from the King of France himself. I paid to find out what was in that letter! Listen, your Majesty, and hear! This is what he wrote, Louis XV, 'The silence of the Empress, and the power that is known to be in her, give us reason to believe that Peter III will not stay long upon the throne.' "

The old man repeated the last words in a voice that shook, while his face was white as chalk, because of the temerity with which he had addressed his sovereign.

Elizabeth Woronzov comprehended. But Peter III did not.

"Breteuil is a fool! Don't you worry, Münnich, my friend! I'm cleverer than all of them. I've got the head that can outwit them. Why, I keep them so busy in my peculiar way — and have such an eye upon them — they don't have time to plot. Don't you worry, Münnich!" He hopped about merrily, bragging and blustering.

"But, your Majesty, this proves that word of a plot must have been sent by Breteuil, to Louis XV. Do you not see it proves it? Do you not see your danger? You must give up everything for the present and hasten to Moscow to be crowned."

The magic word crowned made Elizabeth Woronzov forget again the danger that impended. She wished to put off that crowning until she herself would be the woman to be crowned.

"You are not the first, Münnich, to warn me. Just yesterday I received a letter from my faithful friend, Frederick of Prussia. He warned me, too. He told me to have the Orlovs — and others he named — watched. He told me to keep an eye upon them day and night. I sent him a letter to-day. I told him he need

not worry, because I was too shrewd for the Orlovs, *Madame La Ressource,* and Panin, put together. Why, Münnich, he has warned me every week since her Majesty died. So don't worry, good old Münnich!" patting him affectionately on the back, drawing a chair beside him and seating himself. Elizabeth Woronzov reluctantly left her position by the window where she was showing herself to the crowd outside, and joined them.

"The plan is made, Münnich. This is my opportunity to unfold it. I'm going to begin war with Denmark on account of my Holstein Duchy. Frederick of Prussia will help me — join me. I command the army myself. I intended to start for Denmark the last of the second week in June. To-day is the eleventh, the last day of the celebration. But now, I've changed my mind. I'm not going to start until the day after my birthday, which is June twenty-ninth, Peter and Paul's day.

"I'm going to Oranienbaum to-morrow — and you, too, dear Münnich, to enjoy myself, without a care. For a long time I could not make up my mind what to do with Elizabeth Romanovna here. First I thought I'd take her with me — You see I didn't want to be separated from her. I'm lonesome and unhappy without her. And then I thought it would be too hard for her — to go — so far. This is what I plan to do. On the noon of my birthday, we are to drive from Oranienbaum to Peterhof — where I am sending *Madame La Ressource* — and where she gives a midday dinner in my honor. While we are dining, and she doesn't know a thing about it, my German guards will surround Peterhof. When she arises from the table, after drinking my health, they will arrest her. They will take her — and that son of hers — who is no son of mine — to Schlüsselberg and imprison them — for life — in the prison where Ivan Antonovicz, the

Romanoff prince, is imprisoned. Ivan Antonovicz they will bring to Petersburg. I will declare him my heir. I shall never have any children of my own. He is only twenty-three now and of the blood of the Romanoffs, like myself. I will marry him to my German niece. I had her come with Prince George for that purpose. Then I will have Elizabeth Woronzov appointed regent, while I am at war in Denmark. Thus, you see, the present and the future will be assured. When I come back, I will have my divorce from *Madame La Ressource* proclaimed and I will marry Elizabeth Woronzov. Then, we two will go to Moscow together to be crowned. I will exile —imprison — all the Orlovs, and that fop, Subanski, or else I'll put them to hard labor in the mines. Count Bestushev, whom my blessed aunt, Elizabeth Petrovna, sent to Siberia just before she died, I will behead. What do you think of that for a plan, hey — Münnich? Now do you think I haven't a head on my shoulders? Do you think I need any one's advice?"

"The plan is good, your Majesty. But put it into execution to-morrow. Do not wait. Do not wait a single day."

"Take the advice of Marshal Münnich, your Majesty! He is devoted to you. He is old and wise. He, perhaps, knows something we do not. Take his advice, your Majesty," begged Elizabeth Woronzov, nervously.

"That is just where I am going to prove I am cleverer and braver than all of you. I am going to show you I can defy danger and win. I'm going to snap my fingers in the face of them — and their plots.

"From now until my birthday I am going to rest and amuse myself. I am going to be free — happy. I am not going to think of affairs. To-morrow I and the courtiers — whom I care to invite — go to Oranienbaum

for a good time. I have commanded that Panin and the Grand Duke Paul remain in Petersburg, in the Summer Palace. The Empress — *Madame La Ressource* — is not going to be of the party. She is to go to Peterhof any time she wishes. I do not care when. But she will understand she must be in Peterhof for my birthday dinner. The foreign ambassadors, the prime minister, and the head of the army are to accompany me — and my new Holstein Guard — but not a single Russian soldier or officer. I have selected the seventeen prettiest women in Russia to go as ladies-in-waiting to Elizabeth Woronzov. I tell you, Münnich, it will be a sight when we set out to-morrow! I hope the sun will shine! Everyone will put on court attire. We ride in open carriages, with liveried outriders. Narcissus, my fool, and Mopsinka, my dog, have a carriage to themselves. You'll see how they will be decorated! Narcissus will shine like a sun."

"That is the most dangerous thing your Majesty could do. You will leave her Majesty, Catherine Alexevna, in Petersburg with her friends, with the Russian army, the officers, the men of the navy — and Panin — who are unfriendly to you. You give them a free hand to perfect their plans. I beg your Majesty to give it up. You could not do a more unwise thing!"

"What can they do to me? I have my Holstein Guard!"

"What, your Majesty, are three hundred Holsteiners in comparison with the Russian army? Do not go — I beg you! If you wish to set out to-morrow, let it be to Moscow to be crowned."

At this suggestion Elizabeth Woronzov shook her head at him.

" Don't oppose me any more, good Münnich! It will not do any good. I've set my heart upon it, I tell you. This procession of the court to-morrow to Oranienbaum — in this fine spring weather — will be as famous in history as the triumph of a Cæsar. It will be just as gorgeous. You be ready for the carriage. It will call for you. At Oranienbaum we will revel as the Cæsars reveled. Am I not the Russian Cæsar? Nero played and improvised beside the sea of Greece; I will play beside the Finnish sea. There will be parades of Prussian soldiers. There will be pantomimes. There will be uproarious banquets, genuine bacchanalian revels, when my seventeen beauties and Elizabeth Woronzov will plunge their arms into baskets of red Russian gold and fling handfuls to the crowd, to the servants, to the guard in the grounds. There will be dinners prolonged until day. We will drink to the midnight sun as it circles round the pole and does not set. Under the inspiration of pleasure and happiness I will perfect my plan for Russia to lead the nations of the earth in music. I will invite composers here. They will discover new harmonies. They will write noble compositions. I will civilize and enlighten Russia through music."

Marshal Münnich, with a white and worried face, bowed sadly and left. Elizabeth Woronzov looked at the old man with a combination of triumph and scorn upon her round, fat face, as he went through the door bowing reverently. She was thinking of the costly gown she would wear on the morrow, of the sensation she would create, when she headed the procession of carriages with the Emperor by her side.

The next day, as soon as this procession started for

Oranienbaum, Catherine Alexevna, dressed from head to foot in mourning, without a jewel or sign of rank, holding by the hand her small son, the Grand Duke Paul, walked through the streets of Petersburg, unattended, to the Cathedral of Kasan, where for an hour, she knelt in prayer.

CHAPTER XIII

"[1] THE UNDERTAKING OF MONSIEUR ORLOV"

On the night of the twenty-seventh, it occurred to Peter III to drive to Peterhof to pay a friendly call upon the Empress and to make sure that preparations were going forward properly for the dinner which she was to give to himself and the court on the anniversary of his birth, and to find out just how badly she felt because she had not been invited to his fête. He found Catherine Alexevna no more silent than usual and apparently submissive. Everything seemed to be as he wished. The Grand Duke Paul had been left behind. The Empress was without guests. She was dressed in mourning for Elizabeth Petrovna. The general appearance satisfied him and put whatever suspicions he may have had to rest. When he was taking leave, he said, in a tone of condescending hauteur: "After my birthday dinner I shall stay a while after the guests are gone to talk over some questions of importance, before I leave for the war. It will be necessary to get rid of illusions. We have had too many — you and I. We must begin to look at things sensibly."

She made no reply. She did not wish to open an unwelcome discussion. As he entered his carriage to return, Catherine Alexevna saw Narcissus on the back seat awaiting him. He was dressed in cloth of gold and

[1] The title "The Undertaking of Monsieur Orlov" is the name given to this night's happenings by an old chronicler of Moscow. E. W. U.

grinning like a Chinese idol. She understood that this was the first announcement of the coming divorce.

While Peter III was talking with the Empress in Peterhof, there was multiform activity in Petersburg. An empire was being born which was to influence mightily a new modern world which was just at hand. A young soldier of the Ismailov Guard whispered to another soldier in the silence of night,

"Do you suppose it is true?"

"What?" questioned the other.

"That after the dinner to his Majesty, the Empress and her son are to be arrested by the German Guard — and murdered?"

The second soldier was a hanger on of the increasingly powerful Orlovs. The news was of moment to him. He was staking his future upon their favor. He left his talkative companion, as soon as he could without arousing suspicion, and carried the word to one of the Orlovs. The Orlov in question communicated it to his brothers, who saw to it that the information reached every one taking sides with Catherine Alexevna. Word was sent to Princess Dashkov. She borrowed a soldier's suit from boyish Lieutenant Pushkin of the Preobrashensky Regiment and drove to the house of the Orlovs on the corner of the Great Morskoi. She found the two blond giants, Gregory and Alexis, alone. On the way her woman's wit had been busy.

"Take a carriage, Alexis Orlov — quickly as you can! Drive to Peterhof. Bring Catherine Alexevna here."

"Right, Princess," agreed Gregory Orlov. "They are forcing our hand. There is nothing else to do. We must get ahead of the plot and ruin them, or they will ruin us."

Alexis Orlov's deep bass thundered across the room,

"If Peter III comes back to Petersburg, we shall be imprisoned — or beheaded."

"The list is made out, I've heard," added Gregory. "We've got to get ahead of him to save our necks."

"Bring Catherine Alexevna here. Have her consecrated to-morrow morning. That will settle things. That will save our heads."

"It is the only hope for us now — and her, too," declared Princess Dashkov with emphasis.

"She's right, Alexis! You go after her. Order a carriage with fast horses. Take off your officer's coat and hat so no one will recognize you. Start at once."

"Go, go, Gregory," urged Princess Dashkov. "I will go to Catherine Alexevna's apartments in the Winter Palace and await her coming. In the meantime, I will see Panin, and have him and the Grand Duke Paul prepare for the consecration in the morning. Panin already has written a proclamation. You, Gregory Orlov, make the round of the barracks to-night. Tell Subanski to arouse the Hussars. Tell Count Alexis Razumovsky to inform his brother, the hetman. Warn the Archbishop of Novgorod to be prepared to administer the oath of office. Another thing, Gregory," laughed Princess Dashkov, who was beginning to enjoy the dramatic situation. "Whisper to the army men to have their old green uniforms, the kind they wore under Elizabeth Petrovna, where they can get them. To-morrow we'll Russianize Petersburg in the twinkling of an eye — and banish the influence of Germany just as speedily."

Alexis Orlov was not the only one who set out with speed on the road toward the gulf on this momentous night. A young soldier heard of the conspiracy and started alone to warn Peter III.

Alexis Orlov, telling the driver not to spare the horses,

left Petersburg, rattled over the long bridge, out across a space of level garden land, on through the little villages Rothkabatschki and Goreli; then on through more level garden land. They were asleep in the village of Ligov. No curious heads looked through the windows although the Arctic summer night was light. After he left Ligov, the fields broadened. They began to be interspersed with forests of pine and birch. He was just on the point of descending the little hill at the foot of which, a short stretch of road ahead, he could see the red roofs of Peterhof and the summer pavilion, *Mon Plaisir,* that adjoined it, when a horseman clattered past riding madly. It was a soldier. He recognized the uniform. But the rider he did not know. He was a soldier in the ranks. But he did know that there could be only one reason why a soldier was riding at such speed in this direction tonight. The soldier recognized the huge Orlov. He saw the deep saber wound across his face. He, too, knew what must be Orlov's mission. He knew that he must not fail. He knew that others beside him were on the alert. But Orlov had the best of it. Peterhof, where Catherine Alexevna was staying, was a few hundred yards away. It was within sight. But Oranienbaum, where Peter III was staying, was a distance beyond, by the shore of the Finnish Gulf. Orlov would reach his destination first.

It was ten o'clock when the lonely rider, with no one to help or recommend him, succeeded in forcing his way past the Holstein Guards and into a palace waiting room. He begged to be taken to the Emperor. He said he had something of such vital importance to tell that it could not wait. He was informed that the emperor was asleep. The night before he had given a fête upon the royal yacht. It had lasted until morning. Now the Emperor

was weary. He could not be disturbed. The soldier went out into the garden. He tried to explain to the Holstein Guards the nature of his errand. They laughed at him. They swaggered and swore in German. They mimicked him. "How could anything of importance happen in Petersburg," they retorted, "when his Majesty, the prime minister, Woronzov, the field marshal, Prince George, and the foreign ambassadors are here? Who of importance is left in Petersburg?"

Again he went into one of the waiting rooms. He approached every servant who passed and begged them to take a message to the Emperor.

"It is important," he pleaded. "His throne, his life, are in danger! Let me speak with him! Let me tell him what I know!"

The servants were cross. They were tired from the two weeks' debauchery of the court. They refused. They would not talk. Again, he went into the garden. This time he met Narcissus, who was trying to adjust a blue satin cape with purple fringe to his ridiculous, shapeless body. It was the new garment which he was to wear in honor of the Emperor's birthday. The soldier approached him as a last resort.

"Narcissus, I have a message for your royal master." The soldier was white and trembling. "I rode all night from Petersburg. Can't you take me to him? Can't you do something?"

Narcissus's devotion to his master and his subtle mind reading instinct told him something was happening. He sensed danger.

"Wait a minute! I'll get you paper and pencil. You write it down. Then I'll take the message to him myself."

The young soldier told what he knew of the conspiracy,

sealed it, and wrote upon the outside, "*Very Important.*" Then he remounted his weary horse and turned toward Petersburg, feeling his ride had been useless. He was hungry, thirsty, and worn out with loss of sleep.

Narcissus went to his master's sleeping room and awoke him. Peter III was half drunk, as was usual in the morning. This morning, in addition, he was in a bad temper. His hands were unsteady. His head ached. His eyes were blurred by the unnatural, heavy sleep of a few hours.

"By the body of Holy Isaac, I will have you knouted for waking me, Narcis! I'll order it done right now!" stretching out one skeleton hand for a yellow silk bell-rope.

"My blessed master, a messenger brought this letter from Petersburg. I don't know who he was. He rode all night to get it here. It is important. Open it now."

"I told you you could be Emperor, here in Oranienbaum, yesterday, while I was on the yacht! To-day I'm Emperor myself and I am going to do as I please. Put it on that silver tray there — with the other letters which I have not read."

"Please, Master, open it now!"

"Get out!" reaching toward the yellow bell-rope again. "Get out, I say!"

Narcissus saw the mood his master was in. He knew there was no use in argument. He sadly left the room. He went down stairs and out upon the level, stone entrance and sat down beside one of the marble urns and looked out over the Gulf.

The summer day was oppressive. Moveless, leaden haze veiled the water. The hot sun steeped the spruce and pine woods and scented the heavy air. An unexplained fear oppressed Narcissus. He divined what was

going on. In his anxiety he had forgotten his breakfast. He had forgotten, too, his new costume for the birthday. When he could endure the silence and inaction no longer, he determined to make another effort to awaken the drunken court. He made his way into Elizabeth Woronzov's room. That luxurious lady was awake. The thought of triumph did not permit rest. But she was exhausted from the two weeks' dissipation, and the consequent loss of sleep.

"I beg your Highness to go at once to the Emperor and get him to read the letter a soldier rode last night from Petersburg to bring!"

"Nonsense, Narcis! Of what importance are letters from Petersburg, or from anywhere else — when the court is here? There aren't any people left to write letters," she continued, haughtily.

"Get out, Narcis! I've sent for my breakfast. I have affairs of my own to think about."

She lay indolently back among the pillows and dreamed of the morrow, of Friday, June the twenty-ninth. After the midday dinner on that day, Catherine Alexevna was to be made way with. She, Elizabeth Woronzov, would be regent. The Emperor would depart for the war. She would rule alone. How could she waste time upon the fool, Narcissus? Until her breakfast came she tried to enumerate from memory some of the fabulous gems that had belonged to Elizabeth Petrovna.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Peter III arose. He breakfasted alone and sat down to smoke. He was weary and worn out. He denied admittance to every one. He felt need of quiet and recuperation. After awhile he walked about the room a little, in order to strengthen and stretch his weak legs and increase his circulation. Then, he remembered the letter which

Narcissus had brought. He paused by the table and looked down. An oblong silver tray, littered with unread letters, lay upon it. He picked up the top letter. "That must be the one," he thought. He saw "*Very Important*" written across it. A wave of fretful emotion swept him.

"I said I would have nothing to do with business until after my birthday. It's an Emperor's pride to keep his word. I'll keep mine," and he dropped the letter back upon the tray.

About midnight, when the sun dropped below the horizon for a little while and a cooling wind sprang up and sang blithely in the tops of the tall pine trees, he went out-of-doors and walked slowly down to the edge of the Gulf. Elizabeth Woronzov came out and joined him, but he sent her away again. He told Narcissus to bring the new violin that had come from Italy. A vague questioning touched his mind for a moment as to why no messengers from Petersburg had reached Oranienbaum that day. He dismissed the thought, however, lifted the violin to his chin, looked out across the pallid water toward the old home of his childhood in Sweden, and alone in the night played himself back to peace and calm of soul.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST NIGHT

On the morning of June the twenty-ninth the cavalcade that set out from Oranienbaum toward Peterhof for the birthday resembled in glittering color and general gayety, a circus procession, or the first rising of the curtain upon a new comic opera. Elizabeth Woronzov and Peter III came first in a crystal and gold carriage, with six outriders in yellow. Elizabeth Woronzov was wearing the jewels and the decorations of an Empress. The Order of Catherine blazed across her breast. The flowers upon her head duplicated the Russian crown. Pink pearls circled her throat. Next, came Narcissus in purple and blue satin, and golden bells. Then, the seventeen court beauties, crowned with flowers, and in gorgeous brocades. They carried long, pearl-handled parasols of bright silk. The carriage wheels and the necks of the horses were twined with flowers. Prime Minister Woronzov, Prince George, the foreign ambassadors, were in gala attire and riding in carriages of state.

The summer residents of the neighboring villas, and peasants from the fields, lined the road to see this long-talked-of procession. And the procession moved slowly along the sandy highway, enjoying its own appearance, in the June weather, and the sensation it created. There was laughter. There was merriment and gay song. There was a constant expression of homage to Elizabeth

Woronzov. Each seemed to vie with the other in flattery to this young Empress to be. Peter III was in a radiant mood. He was having his own way, and demonstrating publicly that he was right and other people wrong, which was something that pleased his peculiar temperament. Elizabeth Woronzov was haughty and condescending. She treated every one with the disdain which her great position seemed to her to warrant. She looked out upon the Gulf, tilled fields and forests, indeed upon the outspread landscape of Russia that unrolled beside them, with a pleased air of possession.

Old Marshal Münnich rode with Prime Minister Woronzov. He was silent and distrait. Peterhof and Oranienbaum recalled his youth and Peter the Great, whom he had visited in both these palaces under different conditions. He recalled sadly the great peasant's son — Mentchikov — of whom Peter had made a prince, and had built Oranienbaum for him as a gift. He contrasted sadly the present with the past, and especially the Great Peter with this grandson who bore so many marks of physical and mental degeneration.

"No one will ever rule Russia successfully," he meditated, "who is not powerful and defiant, and loves the joy of life. Any less vivid personality will be swallowed up by its complex immensity and destroyed."

Narcissus was unhappy in spite of his attire and the honor of a carriage to himself. His heart was filled with foreboding and fear. He felt dumbly that the end had come. His soul was inarticulate and he suffered. Not once did he shake his shining bells nor describe his antics. He sat a doleful, dumpy figure in blue satin and purple, with loose, down hanging lips.

When they reached Peterhof, there was no one to greet them and no sign of life. The only sound was the

prolonged, powerful baying of English hounds chained within the palace. The cavalcade halted and waited. No one appeared. Peter III sent an equerry to find why no one came to meet them. The equerry returned with the startling information that the palace was empty. Although the doors and windows were open, there was no one within. Peter III did not know what to do. Everyone was astonished. There was no precedent for an affront like this. Nothing of this kind had happened before. They dismounted and distributed themselves throughout the empty palace and the gardens. Elizabeth Woronzov was the only one who was happy. She felt the Empress did not dare meet her and had fled. Flattered pride kept her happy.

Dinner time approached. There was nothing to eat in Peterhof. The distance to Oranienbaum was considerable. They began to suffer from hunger. Peter III had forgotten his can of German smoking tobacco, his can of Knaster, which occasioned his chief discomfort. He began to curse and swear and abuse every one.

"I'll have her beheaded for this — see if I don't!" he blustered. "I'll teach her to play a trick on me!"

Narcissus had fled to a remote part of the garden where he hid himself where no one could find him. The foreign ambassadors took their note books, distributed themselves comfortably in sheltered places and calmly recorded the happenings for their courts at home. Marshal Münnich and Premier Woronzov avoided each other's eyes. Neither wished to read what he saw in the eyes of the other. Both had premonition of what had occurred. The court beauties flirted gayly with their admirers in the arbors and the summer pavilions. They spread resplendent trains of gold and silver brocade across the smooth, green lawns. The sharp stilettos of

their laughter shone from moment to moment among the blossoming syringa bushes and the beeches.

"My dear Uncle," queried Elizabeth Woronzov of the Prime Minister, "what do you suppose is the cause of this ridiculous insult from *Madame La Ressource?*"

"I am afraid it is something serious, Elizabeth Romanovna."

"How can it be serious, dear Uncle, when the people of Russia — *of consequence* — are here?"

"Yes,— we are here!" he sighed. "But the army, the officers, some of the men of the navy, Catherine Alexevna — and Panin — are in Petersburg."

"What difference do they make? Is not the Emperor here?"

"Emperors have been dethroned," he replied, with slow and disagreeable significance.

Fear bleached her face to a peculiar pallor.

"If it was not wise, dear Uncle, to leave Petersburg, why did you not say so to his Majesty?"

"Did you ever know, Elizabeth Romanovna, that madman to listen to any one — especially if it was for his good?"

The voice was stern. The premier believed he had cast lot with the wrong party, led on by hope of his niece becoming regent, and belief that he would make millions out of army equipment in the war with Denmark. Elizabeth Woronzov fell from her height of happiness.

"Do you not recall, Elizabeth Romanovna, that for two days no messengers from Petersburg have come to Oranienbaum? Do you not recall that no daily word has come from Kronstadt? What can that mean?"

"But is not the Emperor — the — Emperor?"

"He is! But suppose he is a fool, too? Whatever *Madame La Ressource* may or may not be, she certainly

is not a fool," he explained, with no consideration for his listener's feelings. In the twinkling of an eye the attitude of the world had changed. Everything was wrong, where, just a second before, everything was right.

Peter III came out the front door of the palace.

"I cannot find a single can of Knaster anywhere. I keep a supply always! She's thrown them out to annoy me. Do you know where my cousin, Prince George, is? He probably has some German smoking tobacco with him." He passed hurriedly by the premier and his niece in search of his cousin.

The day had been intensely hot. Late afternoon came. Everyone suffered from hunger. They had arisen early. They had taken the long drive. They were worn out, hungry, ill tempered. The flowers that crowned the court beauties and Elizabeth Woronzov were withered. Their gowns looked crushed and soiled. Peter III decided to return to Oranienbaum speedily. They were seated in the carriages and ready, when soldiers rode up and told him he was under arrest. Peter III was so surprised he could not speak. Elizabeth Woronzov answered.

"He is Emperor! Who can arrest him?"

"The new Empress! She was consecrated this morning in the Cathedral of Kasan. The army, the navy, the people have sworn allegiance."

Elizabeth Woronzov's dream of glory was over. She sank back in the carriage a dull, frightened figure. The entire court, excepting only old Marshal Münnich and Peter III, were sent back to Oranienbaum. Marshal Münnich and Peter III dismounted and reëntered Peterhof.

In the splendid, empty palace with its walls of mala-

chite and amber, which bore his name, and which his all-conquering grandfather had built, the unworthy descendant, pitiful and trembling, with Marshal Münnich by his side, read the demand for abdication sent by Catherine Alexevna.

"What shall I do, Münnich? What shall I do?"

"*Fight!*"

"How can I?"

"You have friends! With your Holstein Guard from Oranienbaum, and five thousand other Germans upon whom you can depend, we will march to Petersburg. When the people know you are there, they will come over to you, because you are a Romanoff. I will command myself!" declared the battle-hearted old man. "In the meantime, we will send word to the army at Schlüsselberg and to the navy at Kronstadt. They may join you. I think myself they will! In twenty-four hours the city and the throne will be yours. Why, this does not amount to anything, this demand that you abdicate. It is merely a piece of paper. Look at it. What is that worth? Refuse. That's the thing to do. Then — fight."

"If I were not so hungry, Münnich — and if I had my can of Knaster, perhaps I would. But I don't feel like doing anything just now."

"This is no time for feelings, your Majesty! Tell the messengers to return to Petersburg. Tell them you will answer — in person — with the army. Wait! — I'll tell the messengers for you."

Peter III sat a shivering, shrunken, helpless figure beside a little gilt table, in the luxurious malachite salon. His tiny face with the pale, gray, restless eyes seemed to have faded merely to the ghost of a face. His thin, birdlike hands, on which great Kashmiri sapphires re-

sponded sweetly to the divine blue splendor of the walls, clutched the table edge for support and trembled. Beside him the iron-faced old man stood, who belonged to a sterner age, and who tried to inspirit and to re-invigorate him.

"I tell you what to do, Münnich," he said at last. "Tell them to come to Oranienbaum. Tell them I will decide to-morrow. I have not eaten since morning. Can a man decide important things when his stomach is empty? I'm exhausted. Besides, when I get my can of Knaster, it will steady my nerves. Why couldn't she have waited a day? It was a shame to spoil my party!"

The next morning in Oranienbaum the discussion began again between Peter III and the old man. They sat upon the terrace beside the sea which was pallid and petulant. There was no sun. A storm impended. The atmosphere was orange-tinted and threatening.

"But what if I do not want to be Emperor? What if I'd rather go back home and be Duke of Holstein? I'd rather live quietly there with my music. I could be happy! There's nothing here I want. The Russians are a pack of hyenas. I'd be glad to get away."

"But there is no question of getting away, your Majesty! They would not let you go no matter what they promise. If you are not upon the throne, your existence — it does not matter where upon the face of the earth it may be — would be a source of danger to Catherine Alexevna and the Orlovs. They could not sleep, if you lived. If you do not do as I tell you, take your men and fight, they will murder you."

"But suppose I promise I would never cause trouble?"

"What difference would that make? They are not relying upon promises. They are playing a sure game.

No matter what you promise, can't you see the people would think of you, know you are alive, and speak of you? That would be a menace to them."

"I suppose you know best, Münnich! But I cannot make myself something I am not. I cannot be a statesman or a warrior, all in a minute because some one tells me to, any more than I could be a bird of paradise. I'm miscast in life. That's what's the matter with me, Münnich! I was made for an artist musician, not a warrior. There's no use, dear old Münnich! You cannot make a man out of me. I'm going to sign and get out of Russia. I've had twenty years of misery here. It is worth risking life to get away."

"But your pride? Your duty to your name, to the great destiny to which your Majesty was born?"

"I am honestly more sorry for you, Münnich, than I am for myself! You will grieve over the dethronement of my race. You have the big and noble soul that comprehends. Dear old Münnich! I am not a heroic, battle-tempered conqueror like you. Mine is the soul of a vagabond artist. These royal clothes, these decorations, are an accident I could not help. God knows I would have helped if I could!"

Marshal Münnich bent his head and wept.

Two weeks later the long, gray, sub-Arctic twilight, which was a prolongation of the Polar day, set in with rain. Peter III and Narcissus were alone in the Castle of Ropsha. They sat in the long, narrow, gloomy dining room. Trees and shrubs crowded close about the windows. Sometimes, their long branches tapped upon them like ghosts that tried to warn. The room did not look like the dining room of a royal dwelling. There was no joy in it. Its walls were hung with weapons and sacred icons. Over one end of the table a pictured head

of the Crucified One lifted a pale face adown which tears were discernible. Two tall candles, placed on either end of the table, lighted the room. In that strange rain-filtered pallor, which was neither day nor night, the flames fluttered as if frightened and lost their lustrous gold. They were waiting for dinner to be served. Peter III was hoping for a visit that night from Elizabeth Woronzov and Marshal Münnich, whom he had not seen since he had come here to await the promised return to Sweden. He was hopping about the room restlessly in his peculiar, birdlike manner. His mind was full of plans as usual. He was not discontented nor unhappy. Narcissus sat upon the floor. He was wearing the worn blue satin suit he had put on for the birthday dinner. He sat so motionless his little joy bells did not tingle. From time to time he rolled his great white eyes toward the windows, when the black branches tapped too heavily upon them. While his body was motionless, his mind was intensely alert.

"Dinner is late, Narcis! Go see what's the matter."

Narcissus walked obediently away. But apparently he had no interest in the order. He was gone a long time. His master became restless, stopped pacing the floor and listened for his coming.

"There is no one in the castle, my Master. It is empty. Even the cooks are gone."

Narcissus dropped limply down upon the floor and stared up at him.

"Empty!" The word made Peter III recall that other day when the equerry had brought him word that Peterhof was empty. He began repeating the surprising word to himself as if he did not comprehend its meaning. He rang sharply to make sure. There was no answer. Peter III did not know what to think. Fear began to

tap busily against the sensitive brain of Narcissus. He inclined his head toward the door that led — at one end of the room — into the outer hall.

"My Master — take off your uniform! Put on a servant's suit, take what money and jewels you have, and escape — through the kitchen entrance!"

"Escape? What from?"

"Don't wait to ask, my Master. Go, while there is time. Something terrible is going to happen. Always, my blessed Master, I have warned you. You have never heeded. Do not question to-night. Go!"

"Nonsense, Narcis! You have an ague. That's what's the matter with you. Elizabeth Woronzov and Marshal Münnich are coming to se me to-night."

"Do not believe it! Take what gold you have, disguise yourself, and leave the castle. Perhaps you could buy your way back to Sweden. There you would be safe."

The gray, spectral rain beat upon the windows and the black trees bent to touch them.

Then, upon a sudden, it was as if the room were strangely lighted, and by something evil. Two glowing, golden figures, diffusing light like suns, stood in the doorway — Gregory and Alexis Orlov. They were in full regalia. They had just come from the first court which Catherine Alexevna was holding. Its atmosphere and its glitter were still upon them. For a few moments no one spoke. Narcissus crouched nearer and nearer to the floor as if he would gladly fade into it. The Grand Duke broke the silence.

"You two have taken my throne away — and my family — and now I suppose you are after my life."

Gregory Orlov felt for his sword.

Like lightning Narcissus darted under the long table,

climbed upon a divan on the other side, snatched a sword from the wall and gave it to the Grand Duke. With a like nimbleness he knocked over the two candles and left the room in perplexing dimness. In this gray, Arctic prolongation of day into night, the Grand Duke looked more like a spirit than a man of flesh and blood. Even Gregory Orlov, as insensitive to impressions as he usually was, felt it. Something almost like fear passed over him. He turned to his brother Alexis.

"Take that vicious little black devil out and put an end to him!"

Two white moon eyes of horror looked up at the burly Alexis. Alexis took a twist in the blue-purple doublet of Narcissus at the back of the neck band, shut off his breath deftly, and carried him out through the door. The two men, who faced each other in the game of death in the long, dim dining room, heard a savage shiver of little bells. Then, silence. Then, once again that discordant shrilling, after which a weight that fell dully dropped among the syringa bushes beneath the window.

Alexis Orlov did not reënter to see what was happening. He understood that Gregory did not wish even a brother's eyes upon the work of to-night. The steel-like suppleness and thinness of Peter III, who fought with the desperation of a demon, kept the huge Orlov at bay. Orlov could not meet this dazzling agility. But he excelled in strength and powers of resistance. At first, there was something uncanny about the silence of Peter III, his fearlessness, and his ghastly appearance in the uncertain light, that lamed the skill of Orlov. Surely this strange, thin figure with the wild and swaying arms, twitching face and dim eyes that fought opposite him, was a spirit and not a man. And the figure did not

speak. It did not reproach. It did not beg for life. It evidently felt neither anger nor grief. A sensation new to Gregory Orlov arose within him. It was shame. He was ashamed of the great hulking body that fought for the death of this helpless, trembling phantom. He determined not to kill him with the sword. At least he would spare himself the crime of shedding blood. That he would not do. He fought now to disarm him. This was merely a question of successfully countering and wearing his opponent out. When at length he succeeded in doing this, twisted the sword from his hand and it hissed across the room, he saw, with a fresh pang of shame and discomfort, that the white, gemmed hand that had held that sword, was the size of the hand of a woman. He could do no more. He called his brother Alexis and turned and left the room.

It was a good hour later when the rough, echoing voice of Alexis called to him and told him to reënter. On the floor beside the dining table lay the dead body of Peter III. A napkin was stuffed in his mouth, and another tied tightly about his throat. After death came the face seemed to have caved in and shrunken, until it looked no larger than the face of a child. The same thing was true of the body. It was merely a thin mask of flesh, ready at any time to crumble, that had held this phantom of a ruler. The two stalwart men of the people, who stood and looked down at him where he lay dead upon the floor, symbolized the rising might of the masses, which in time would overthrow the frail and fading delusions of kings and kingly power.

" I'll go and bring Narcis," declared Alexis, brusquely, without any hesitation or compassion. He opened the long French window, searched among the wet syringa bushes, and then came back.

"There! — let the two fools rest together!" he declared in disgust, as he flung the body brutally upon the floor beside his master.

They reëntered the palace long after the members of the court had gone. When Catherine Alexevna came forward to meet them, robed royally in white satin and diamonds, which she had put on to receive the first homage of the nobility, she was as cold and brilliantly reflecting to look upon as snow wastes beneath the sun.

Gregory Orlov bowed in his invariably graceful manner, but he did not hasten to speak. Alexis bent his tall body with courtly reverence and declared, "His Majesty, Peter III, has just died in the Castle of Ropsha — of an attack of colic."

"Have the body taken to the Cathedral where it is my pleasure that it should lie in state," was the calm reply.

The voice, that announced to Catherine Alexevna the death of Peter III, announced at the same time the passing of the Romanoffs.

In the small hours of the morning, they dined together, amid the laugh of crystal and of candles, the three resplendent new colossi who bestrode the Slavic world, Catherine Alexevna, and Gregory and Alexis Orlov. Russia was theirs. A greater or a less important future depended upon their adherence to each other. They could not hesitate now. The die was cast. Whatever occasion demanded must be done.

"A crime is not really a crime in a sovereign, the way it is in an individual," declared Gregory Orlov in argument, smiling luxuriously across the wine, and toying idly with a glass of Siberian crystal which was tinted slightly gray like a moth's wing.

"What would be a crime in an individual, is in a sovereign an impersonal act of political necessity," added the bass of Alexis. "Great virtues are for little, unimportant people. They are the only things they are able to own. They do not cost expenditure of either enterprise or daring."

Catherine Alexevna knew what was coming. Her own clear mind had looked ahead and seen, just as theirs had done. She could not turn back. There was no way. She was confronted again with the old complication which Count Bestushev-Rjumin had first presented to her in her youth — the choice between giving up her own life, or taking the life of another.

"Besides," declared Gregory Orlov, "outside the realm of politics, one is justified — always — in acts of self-preservation."

"Out with it, Orlov," she demanded.

"You have succeeded — so far — your Majesty. But to make success permanent, there are *two* who stand in your way. As long as they live neither your life nor your throne are safe."

Alexis Orlov was glad his brother had struck at the heart of the matter. He looked at him gratefully. He had reason to be proud of Gregory.

"They are Prince Ivan Antonovicz, and the daughter of Elizabeth Petrovna and Alexis Razumovsky. She is living in Florence with a Russian family. These two are the last of the race. Each has a right to the throne greater than your own."

Catherine Alexevna remembered with a vividness that was painful the miniature in a plain frame of beveled gold, which she herself had taken from the dead fingers of Elizabeth Petrovna. Alexis Razumovsky had begged for it to be given to him. She recalled how he had wept

and kissed it. This seemed most terrible of all. And worst — was her own ingratitude toward that royal woman whom she had loved.

"She — the girl in Florence — does not know who she is," Alexis Orlov was explaining. "It will be easy to lure her to Russia, and then —"

Catherine Alexevna held up a hand to stop the explanation. She could not listen to it now. But she knew that it would not be long before she would be forced not only to listen, but to agree to that unsaid plan of Alexis Orlov. She had heard that Ivan Antonovicz was an idiot. And the girl in Florence — she avoided definite thought of her.

When the two Orlovs arose from the table and said good night, they said good night, not to Catherine Alexevna whom they had known in the past, their old merry companion of the gentle heart and gay disguises, but to Catherine the Great, who would hesitate at nothing. And the handsome Orlovs understood this. They knew that she would not oppose their plans for the two, which made life safe for her, and smoothed the way for that ambitious future they dreamed for themselves.

It was as the Ghostly Chancellor had predicted,— she stood upon the crest of the world alone. And as she herself had predicted, the destruction within her had become complete. Father, mother, husband, friends, favorites, lovers,— they were all gone, and their going had made free the path of progress for her. She could think very clearly, but she could not feel. She was merely a machine of state, now, that wore the gems of a woman.

In her own room she did not call her women to disrobe her. She stood alone by the window, a white glittering figure — like the statuette of ivory of the cold

and cruel face — watching the spectral dawn creep over the dead, sleeping city. And as this wan, gray dawn was not the joyous, golden sunrise of more fortunately situated lands, she knew that like it here was not the warmth of life. And the dead, sleeping city — lying so inert and silent under the new dawn — seemed to be conscious of her who watched it, who one day would lash it into life and renewed vigor, and whom, in return, the world would call " the Monster of the North."

THE END

NOTE.— The Grand Duke Paul, who came after Catherine the Great, was not the son of Peter the Third, who never had any children of his own. He was the son of Catherine and her first lover, Saltikov. For proof of this see any authoritative writer on the history of the Russian Eighteenth Century.

NOTE.— Lomonossov, Michail Vassilevich (1711–1765), was the father of Russian poetry. He wrote a grammar of the language and arranged the rules of verse. He was also a scientist and his work in this field is considered of value to-day.

Dershawin, Gavril Romanovich (1743–1816), was a poet, scholar, soldier and courtier. He is the greatest Russian poet of the Eighteenth Century. He was a friend of Pushkin, who admired him greatly. He first won recognition by the poem *Felitsa,* under which title he sang the praises of Catherine the Great. He is celebrated for his *Ode to God,* which is perhaps the most widely translated poem in literature. He was a lifelong favorite of the Empress.

Novikov, Nikolay Ivanovich, (1744–181). A Russion writer of the reign of Catherine the Great, was a journalist, satirical writer and editor of *The Drone.* At one time the Empress collaborated with him in a publication. He was a philanthropist and eager for the study and advancement of science among his people.

He was imprisoned for his advanced views. It was the Grand Duke Paul who gave him freedom again, when he came to the throne.

Von-Visin, Denis Ivanovich (1744–1792), was a satirical writer. His best comedies are *The Brigadier* and *The Minor.* We are indebted to his letters for information about the life of Catherine herself, and conditions during the early years of her reign.

When Catherine Alexevna recalled Count Bestushev-Rjumin from exile she had deputations meet him at the large cities along the way, and each deputation presented to him a new gift and a new honor.

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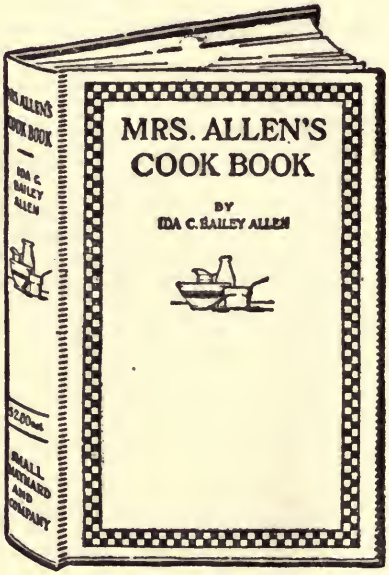

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